PRINTER'S DEVIL

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PRINTER'S DEVIL

By the same authors

ENTER SIR JOHN

PRINTER'S DEVIL

By
CLEMENCE DANE
and
HELEN SIMPSON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
LONDON MCMXXX

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To
CLEMENCE HELEN
From
CLEMENCE AND HELEN

CHAPTER ONE — A PUBLISHER AT HOME

So good a lady that no tongue could ever
Pronounce dishonour of her.

KING HENRY VIII.

A CLOCK struck ten. Immediately, as though inspired by some demon of noise, the telephone on Horrie Pedler's desk began to clamour like a fretful baby: and like a fretful baby was stilled by being taken up.

"Hullo!" said Horrie Pedler. "What? Who? When? They want me to speak on behalf of the publishing trade at a public dinner celebrating the anniversary of the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*? Tell them I'm sorry. Too many 'ofs,' my good people."

Such invitations were flattering, but they were frequent; and, though Horrie Pedler liked speaking and spoke admirably, speeches involved the eating of meals, or rather the enduring of meals, and the conversations of neighbours profoundly interested in meals, to whom speeches were the cursed spite of meals, but as necessary after them as indigestion. Besides, recollected Horrie Pedler, slitting open letters marked "personal" and breaking off her trend of thought at half-minute intervals to dictate answers into her dictaphone, it would mean a new dress. This was the argument that weighed most firmly against acceptance, and most

strangely ; for Horrie Pedler was not only a publisher of note, but a woman.

But she was a woman over sixty and accustomed to her own way. In a long and prosperous career Horrie Pedler had got the better of all disabilities save one. She could not clothe herself with propriety. She could not choose clothes nor dressmakers, never had the time nor the patience to be fitted, nor the cunning to wear her expensive garments when made. She looked, and knew that she looked, like a distinguished rag-picker, and had learned not to care ; but her lifelong struggles with fashion had left her sore ; and a new dress reminded her more forcibly even than her daily routine that she was not the word of power which she bluffed literary England into thinking her.

For the word publisher carries with it, to those not initiated, a suggestion of limitless and ruthless power. It is true that Horrie hopefully paid a large number of argumentative persons to do her bidding without argument, and held others tightly in the grip of contracts, which they occasionally and quite ineffectually endeavoured to break. She was aware, too, that she could have many more slaves if she chose : that free men and women by the hundred longed with intensity to bear her yoke ; to which end they sent manuscripts hopefully by registered post. When these were returned they exclaimed against the fool woman who did not know literature when she saw it, and swore that the Pedlar's Pack publishing house was past its

prime, and that they were glad, on thinking it over, that they had not connected themselves with so enfeebled and Victorian a firm. Everyone knew that Horrie Pedler was a skinflint over advertising, for instance. She did not understand publicity work. No, they were well out of it. So they said ; so they lied ; and in their hearts knew that they lied, and continued, even while they blustered, to plan the forwarding of fresh manuscript, which should cajole the fool woman into yoking them to her chariot-wheel.

Occasionally she yielded, though with a sigh ; for she thoroughly understood the consequences. Power for Horrie ? Slavery for Horrie. The consequences were, as she had foreseen, that her minions dragooned, pursued, and harassed her from ten in the morning until as late at night as she would grant them interviews. To these assiduities may be added those of the telephone, the office and her own domestic staff, not to mention her publicity agent, Koko Fry.

For Horrie Pedler, who was never too proud to take a hint, had recently, after pondering the animadversions on her advertising, engaged a cheerful youth of twenty-five to bring her into touch with modern methods. He had done it, having graduated brilliantly in the hard school of Fleet Street, with a devastating thoroughness that startled but did not displease his employer. For Horrie Pedler was young at heart : and, if her life was about as far removed from the tranquil despotism imagined by the uninitiate as it possibly could be, she still enjoyed it as

zestfully as she had enjoyed bicycling in bloomers in her respectable youth, and chaining herself to a Downing Street railing in her respected middle age. In fact, her continued success as a publisher may have been due to the fact that the older she grew the more she enjoyed being in a rush. Confusion stimulated her, and she did not mind the fact that the world every day grew noisier.

Indeed, no sooner had she set down the receiver than hullabaloo itself broke out in the adjoining office. It might have been the whooping of victorious footballers ; it might have been news of the apparition of a comet ; or the exasperation of a cage full of nut-defrauded monkeys : it was as alarming and passionate as all these. But the arbitress of literary destinies, writing a neat " Horatia Pedler " at the foot of a contract, paid not the faintest attention. She folded the document neatly, and looked up only when the door was burst open from without and a small, plump personage in a chef's white cap and apron flapped into the room, and, once inside, continued to flap as if he were indeed that contradiction in nature, a penguin in a passion.

" Now, Ulysse," said Horrie Pedler cosily, " what's the matter with you ? "

The penguin tossed its head.

" The matter with me, madame—nothing ! It is zoze girls ! Zey tell me that you cannot see me—me ! Zat it is not important ! The menu for the banquet Poole is not important ! " He laughed ironically.

"Well, since you are here," said Horrie Pedler soothingly, "show me."

Instantly her chef tossed his passion from him with the gesture of one discarding a used apron, beamed upon his employer, and, with a preliminary and conspiratorial glance at the door behind him, produced from the vest pocket of his white coat a gilt-edged card. On it was set out a menu, written, it seemed, with a pin dipped in some decoction of violets. Horrie received and studied it gravely; but she made no comment. Both knew that it was the conception of a master; and both knew that criticism was the last thing required. Horrie Pedler ruled by a nice understanding of what the world and her subordinates required of her.

"Beautiful!" Thus Horrie, when the proper silence was reverently over. "Beautiful! You're an artist! I wish I had your imagination."

She returned the card as though reluctant to part with such a chef-d'œuvre; and the penguin permitted a smile to play about his pursed mouth. His mistress, though a woman, was an artist also. They understood each other.

"*Alors*——" said Ulysse, finishing the scene to his satisfaction, and retired to execute his conception, as a small dark girl, with violently waved hair and fingers manicured till they shone like pink cultured pearls, entered. It was obvious that they were rivals, for they exchanged fiery glances as they passed each other in the doorway. But the peace was not otherwise broken.

"I told him!" said Miss Gigg, anticipating reproof, as the door closed loudly. "I said to him, 'You've got no business in there,' I said. Well, then he started to go on at me, and I've only got the first two records of 'French by Phone.' I couldn't even answer him."

"Where's Miss Bedenham?" said Horrie Pedler, frowning.

"Miss Bedenham," said Miss Gigg, relinquishing the problem of Ulysse for a newer grievance—"Miss Bedenham's in a Chelsea bus, Miss Pedler! That's where you'll find Miss Bedenham; and not far past Piccadilly at that, I should say. Late again and the third time in the week, and not so much as an excuse offered. I mean—one's always willing to help out, like I am now, Miss Pedler: and if Miss Bedenham comes to me as next in charge and says to me, 'Viola, I was at the skating rink,' or 'I had friends from the country, Viola,' or 'I washed my hair before I seen I run out of a shilling for the meter,' why I'd say welcome! Turn and turn about and what's five minutes once in a way—that's how I see it, and a margin allowed for the personal equation. We've all a right to the personal equation—I'm with her there. But to come in without an 'Excuse me!' I do say it's not fair to the rest of us. I say it to you, Miss Pedler, just as I'd say it to her own face. I mean—why not offer the excuse?"

"Hm!" said Horrie Pedler, who rarely commented on what she heard; for she ruled

her business in the belief that it was good for the most efficient woman to be allowed free conversation, and treated her employees much as she treated her midday glass of stout, blowing off the froth before she left them to settle. "Hm!" and she took the papers from her under-secretary's hand.

"Estimate from Holt's," said Miss Gigg rapidly and as though reciting a telegram; "inquiry from William Walter Jones & Co. will we furnish a statement of sales et cetera, re Mr. Pointer's income tax private letter Miss Tonge's private letter Miss Vindex Sawyer private letter invitation will you take the chair at debate Lady Margaret Hall June the twelfth re decadence of modern woman——"

She paused for breath.

"Have you got your pad there?" asked Horrie Pedler, reading. "Take one or two letters, please, by hand. I've finished my cylinders."

Miss Gigg seated herself, crossed her knees, laid a shorthand pad upon the upper, snatched a stub of pencil from its lurking place behind her ear, and, giving the implement a preliminary swift lick, assumed a look of glad attention.

"Messrs. Holt and Co., Pudding Street, E.C.," Horrie dictated. "Dear Sirs, I have your letter of the 15th inst. with your estimate for preparing the twelve blocks for the Poole illustrated edition of *The Devil's Buttonhole*. As these demand nothing more elaborate than the ordinary process, I am at a loss to know why your

estimate for this work should exceed the usual charge by £15. As I am not aware——"

Here the telephone bell broke in upon her dictation.

"Hullo!" said Horrie. "Mr. Poole? Certainly! Put him through!" She paused and continued calmly—"of any trade conditions which should justify such an increase of price, I do not propose to accept your offer and—— Yes? Hullo! Hullo, Marmion, is that you? Nice of you! Well? Are we expecting you? My dear Marmion, don't pose! You know perfectly well it's the most exciting luncheon of my career, let alone yours. What? I'm sorry, Marmion! I apologise. Of course, of course! What, after all, is a publisher's career compared with a poet's? But you can get another publisher much more easily than I can get another Poole. No, my dear, I mean it. I'm far too old and wise to flatter anyone over twenty-five. You're fifty? I don't believe you! Wait till you're sixty-five, like me. Of course! Every lion in London—old and young—especially the young: they count most nowadays. God, how they count! And darlings most of them! Not more conceited than you were at twenty-five, but quite as ruthless. That's why they're all on tenterhooks to see you—it's the legend of ruthlessness, my dear!"

A pause.

"What? I most certainly shan't tell you the menu. I never heard of such a thing. You'd object to something, and I can't have Ulysse upset."

A pause. A laugh.

"Vegetarian? But, my dear, Shaw's a vegetarian already! Can't you think of—— All right, have it your own way! I'll tell Ulysse. What?"

A longer pause, during which Miss Gigg looked with detachment into a large convex mirror at the end of the room which reflected her image unfavourably, before Horrie Pedler spoke again.

"What? I can't quite hear. A surprise for me? Marmion dear, you've been surprising me for twenty years. What is it now? Not till lunch? Well, this is all very mysterious; but I've got some work to do, Marmion. Till half-past one then! No, no more! Good-bye!"

With the click of the replaced receiver Miss Gigg shifted her Lady-of-Shalott-like gaze and became once more the brisk and willing subordinate. Horrie Pedler, changing abruptly from friendship to business, rounded off her letter to Messrs. Holt in no ambiguous manner, and turned her attention to Miss Tonge.

"Miss Temperance Tonge," she announced, "High Hand, Barset. Dear Miss Tonge, I am sorry that you should have had trouble with the last proofs. I might at the same time point out that it is not customary to supply proofs for correction more than twice, and that you have already had three sets. I am inclined to think that you might save yourself much annoyance and help the compositors greatly in the future by a more resolute use of the dictionary. In the circumstances you will see, I am sure, that the

cost of a further revision must be borne by you. Yours sincerely. Now, this invitation——"

The telephone bell sounded. Patiently Horrie Pedler lifted the receiver again to her ear.

"Yes? Put him through. Yes, Miss Pedler speaking. Yes, that's so. A lunch of welcome. But you'd better get in touch with Mr. Fry, I think; he's in charge of Mr. Poole's publicity. Not at all. It's no trouble. That was the *Hue and Cry*," continued Miss Pedler to her secretary, "wanting free copy."

"But that's Fry's department," said the secretary.

"And well they know it. But they always think they can get more out of me. Bless 'em—they're psychologists, the Press," said Miss Pedler thoughtfully. And then, becoming aware of a feverish quality in Miss Gigg's bearing, "Well, what's the matter with you, child?"

"Excuse me, Miss Pedler," said her undersecretary self-consciously, "what time did you say Mr. Poole would be coming?"

"The lunch is at two. But I told him one-thirty. He's religiously half an hour late always," returned Horrie Pedler surprised. "Why?"

Miss Gigg blushed.

"Ever since I read *The Devil's Buttonhole* I wondered what he was like," faltered Miss Gigg. "Oh, I do think he must be wonderful!"

"My good child," said Horrie Pedler, cutting her short, "you'll find lunch much more satisfying than staying in to gape at Marmion Poole.

You'll see quite enough of him in the next month or so unless he's greatly changed. He was more trouble to the office than all the rest of the barnyard put together in the old days," said Horrie prosaically. "He'll keep you all on the run with his proofs and his revisions and his income tax and his whatnots, believe me!"

"Ah!" said Miss Gigg profoundly—"I always did say you can't cage an eagle."

"Cage a peacock!" said her employer tartly. Then, returning to business—"Now then, take this down! Oh"—she broke off—"I must warn Ulysse. There'll have to be special food cooked, and Ulysse will have a breakdown. Vegetarian! Marmion always was the limit. No, I can't face Ulysse. I'll send him a note." And added, imploring: "I dare say you wouldn't mind just giving it to him?"

Reluctantly but gallantly Miss Gigg accepted the commission.

"After all," said Miss Gigg philosophically, "it doesn't matter what he says if I don't understand, does it? and if it eases him——"

The telephone bell interrupted her meditations on the Gallic temperament.

"Answer it," said Horrie, scribbling; and Miss Gigg ministered.

"Do you want to see Mr. Fry, Miss Pedler?" she inquired, as Horrie folded her note.

Horrie hesitated.

"Yes—no—yes, send him up at once—or wait! In ten minutes."

She ruffled the remaining papers and tossed

them aside. Then, sitting with her hands before her on the desk, she played finger exercises, unimaginative melodies which she had renounced at the age of ten, but which recurred to her mind whenever she was puzzled. Miss Gigg waited, fingering the message to Ulysse. The silence lengthened.

"Anything more, Miss Pedler?" she asked at last.

"More?" said Horrie Pedler, her fingers ceasing their tune. "No. Have these letters typed. And if Miss Bedenham has arrived, send her in to me."

Miss Gigg retired. Horrie, rising from her swivel chair, walked to the window and stood, squaring her shoulders in the warmth of the pale London sun, narrowing her eyes from mere habit, but noticing nothing that she saw. She stood thus for half a minute, her under-lip pushed forward in a grimace of perplexity. Then, at a tap at the door, she turned abruptly and came back to her chair.

The girl who entered was tall, with smooth, honey-coloured hair, and eyes brown as November leaves. She was badly dressed and she walked with a graceful vagueness that contrasted oddly with the alertness of Miss Gigg. Coming without haste to the desk, she smiled at Miss Pedler and waited.

"My child," said Horrie, "I hear you're late again. Sit down."

"I'm afraid I was," said Gilda Bedenham ruefully, as she obeyed.

"Excuse?" said Horrie.

The girl shook her head.

"I was reading in the omnibus and—I'm sorry to say I went too far."

Horrie's mouth twitched.

"How far?" she pounced.

Gilda Bedenham looked all ways but at her employer.

"Well, to the terminus," she said. "Finsbury Park, I think it is." And then: "I'm dreadfully sorry. I don't know how it is," she lamented, "but when I am deep I just forget where I am."

"Hm!" said Horrie Pedler thoughtfully. "I don't know what to say, I'm sure."

"I'll make it up, of course," said the girl, distressed.

"It's not that," said Horrie. "Let me see, you've been here three months, haven't you?"

The girl nodded.

"Three months. We agreed that it should be an experiment. You were to take that time to learn the job."

The girl lifted her eyes that were no longer vague, but held a definite question. Horrie answered it.

"I'm afraid," said Horrie hopelessly, "that it hasn't been the success we both of us hoped. I'm afraid you're quite unsuited, at least to the office side of the business! I don't say you haven't worked. I'm quite sure you have. But it's evidently not your job, office work. That's what it is," continued Horrie more cheerfully,

now that she had found an excuse for the culprit, "it's just that; for all your qualities, my dear"—she beamed at her affectionately—"office work's not your job. Never mind," said Horrie, "we must think of something else, that's all."

"Unsuited," the girl repeated. Her voice was slow and clear, and clipped to an Oxford pattern. "But I can type twice as fast as the others."

"Speed doesn't count for much when the work has to be done again," said Horrie Pedler. "You are inaccurate. You improve on what is dictated."

"Most of the letters," said the girl, with a shrug, "are in such hopeless English."

Miss Pedler laughed.

"That's what I mean," said she, "about office work not being your job. You don't need good English in an office. It's a drawback."

"You want me to go, then," said the girl calmly. "Is that it?"

"I can't keep you on in the office," said Horrie Pedler defensively, "much as I should like it. A business of this kind can't be run on favouritism. It upsets the rest of the staff, don't you see? It can't be done. No, we must find something else. Manuscripts to be read, to begin with. Don't worry, child, I'll think of something."

"Don't bother, please," said the girl, rising. "I can manage. When would you like me to go?"

"My dear child," said Horrie, "don't take that silly tone with me. Goodness me, aren't I in charge of you?"

"You've been very kind," said her employee, "but you've never been my guardian. And, anyway, I'm twenty-one, and I'm not going to accept charity. If I'm unsuited, I'd better go. At the end of the week?"

"I think you're ungracious and ungrateful," said Horrie angrily. And then, with the absurd school-girlish descent from her dignity which was characteristic of her: "My dear, it's no fault of mine that you get out at Finsbury Park. The truth is," said Horrie, "you shouldn't have gone to Oxford. I knew it at the time. I ought to have stopped it. It's far too cloistral," said Horrie, rubbing her nose meditatively. "Goodness me, where do you suppose I'd be if I'd gone to Oxford instead of keeping my wits about me? I don't blame you, my dear, but I do blame the system. Shutting up a girl in a college till she doesn't know Piccadilly Circus from Finsbury Park!"

"I'd rather not discuss my education," the girl interrupted coolly; "and I'd like to tell you that, though I know I'm in the wrong over this and I'm sorry it's come this way, I should have had to go in any case."

She moved toward the door. But Horrie, the arbitress, the inevitable holder of trumps, realising at last that she was being defied on her own ground, summoned her habit of authority to her aid.

"Nonsense!" she said loudly. "You must listen to me, Gilda! Dear child, you've no idea of the difficulty of getting work. Besides, to some extent I'm responsible for you, and——"

"Nonsense!" said the girl in her turn, not loudly but very definitely. "I am my own mistress and I'll go when I please."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Horrie Pedler, rising too. "I won't hear of it."

The girl turned on her. Anger flared in her eyes.

"I'll go to-day," she said. "Do you think I'm blind? I understand quite perfectly why you can't keep me, and it's got nothing to do with my inefficiency. It's the very reason why I can't possibly stay."

She was gone. The door had closed without noise before Horrie Pedler could find words. But for a long five minutes after her departure Horrie Pedler's fingers continued to play on her blotting-paper the inaudible tune of perplexity and distress. Then, with an effort of will, she put the whole matter aside, for these were business hours, and her private worries had nothing to do with business. She pressed the bell which would warn her secretary to show in Mr. Fry.

Mr. Fry—Koko to his intimates—did not, as the French say, make himself prayed. Without delay he burst into Horrie Pedler's dignified yet business-like room, grinned, deposited his hat, and immediately turned his back to her and struck an attitude.

"What's this?" said Horrie Pedler rather shortly; for her last interview had ruffled her. "What are you doing?"

Mr. Fry parted with regret from his attitude and whisked round to face her.

"And they say women notice these things!" said he reproachfully. Then, in response to Horrie's gaze of misunderstanding, added: "New suit! First time on! Will this make our Mr. Poole sit up or won't it?" And he struck a second attitude, reciting:

"Lord Marmion viewed the landscape bright——"

"And well he may," interrupted Horrie, recovering her good humour. "You chose that blue by artificial light."

Mr. Fry broke off and gaped at her, then surveyed his own person without distaste.

"How did you know?" said he.

But Horrie shook her head, smiling. It was a blue, reckless yet presentable; and the suit was well cut. His tie might pass; his shoes would do; his thin Londoner's face was eager beneath the falling plume of hair.

"Anyhow," said she, "you look very nice."

"I'm a wow!" he agreed gravely; and suddenly sat down with the air of one furiously pressed for time.

"All very well," said he; "but it isn't business! That's the trouble with women: they can't stick to business. It's clothes, clothes, clothes, from a.m. to p.m. Come on! Let's get down to it! Marmion Poole! Programme of

publicity for! Starting from to-day! No need to go into the lunch. I'll work that up. Does he photograph well? Don't matter, anyway. I know a fellow turns 'em all out Valentinos. He charges a lot and they won't accept his photos for passports, but that needn't worry us. It's the women's monthlies I'm after. I suppose he doesn't smoke a pipe? No? Pity! Women like a manly man. Here's a plan of the free stuff. Not bad, eh? Oh, they're interested all right. Not as interested as they will be, though, when I get going. I tell you, Marmion Poole's going to be news with a capital N. What I think is——"

There was a tap at the door, and Miss Gigg appeared, wide-eyed with dismay.

"Miss Bedenham's gone," said she, without further preliminary. "Walked out. I said to her: 'Where do you think you're going? Don't you feel well?' And she gave me ever such a look. 'Well,' I said——"

"Miss Bedenham?" Koko Fry interrupted. "We met on the stairs, and she thought I was a pane of glass."

"That's what I meant," said Miss Gigg.

"Gone, eh?" meditated Koko Fry. "For good?"

"I hope not." Horrie was distressed.

"I wouldn't whistle her back, you know," said Mr. Fry. "Why, I saw her out once having lunch with herself; and what do you think she was reading? Music! Sure! Five lines at a time! For fun, mark you!"

"Be quiet, Koko!" said Horrie, disregarding. "It's all right, Miss Gigg. Miss Bedenham had an urgent message. Arrange her work among you." Then, seeing a piteous inquiry in Miss Gigg's eye: "You needn't alter the lunch hours."

"Another of 'em," said Koko Fry, disgusted, as Miss Gigg withdrew—"gaping after Marmion Poole. He's got S.A. all right, Marmion Poole has."

The door closed behind Miss Gigg.

"No story there, I suppose?" said Koko Fry, and cocked an eye on Horrie. "This Bedenham business?"

"No story," said Horrie firmly. "But something's got to be done about it all the same. She's quarrelled with me and gone off in a temper."

"Girl's a fool!" said Mr. Fry bluntly.

"Not she," rejoined Horrie sharply. "There's nothing the matter with Gilda except absence of mind."

"You've said it," Mr. Fry heartily agreed. "Absence of any sort of mind, intellect, grey matter, or sense. Where does she think she's going to get another job?"

"That's the question," said Horrie Pedler. "Of course she won't take any advice from me while she's in this mood."

"It beats me," continued Mr Fry, ruminating, "why you worry about the girl. She doesn't hurt the eye, I grant you. But as for brains——"

"She's got flair," said Horrie Pedler definitely. "She knows a book when she sees one. I was training her. I wanted her to go through the business side; but I want her really for her flair. An Oxford education, Koko—it's a wonderful thing for a woman: gives them something—the power to walk out of my office, for instance, as Gilda did just now. I don't say it makes them practical; but then that's nothing. Anybody can be practical. I'm practical."

"You are," said K. K. Fry. "That's why I can't understand——"

"Never mind that," Horrie Pedler interrupted. "What I want you to do is to keep an eye on her till she's cooled down."

"Me?" asked the astounded Koko.

"You!" said Horrie Pedler with decision. "No one can do it better. Go along and call on her sometime. Find out how she's managing. Just drop in of your own accord."

"Drop in," said Mr. Fry, with gloom, "and get dropped on. All right. Where does she live?"

"Chelsea," said Horrie Pedler.

"Chelsea," echoed Mr. Fry. "She would. Hullo, what's up now?"

For Miss Gigg had reappeared apologetically.

"I forgot," said Miss Gigg. "There's two pressmen from the *Hue and Cry* asking about Mr. Poole downstairs, and a lady wants his address. Am I to give it? And Ulysse says——"

But she was cut short in her statement by a

hullabaloo similar to that which previously had shocked the adjoining office. It was brief, however, and ended with the loud and sudden opening of the door, and the magnetic kitchen master reappeared, not passion-racked, but serene.

"I have him!" cried Ulysse. "The vegetarian sweet—I have him! I lay him at the feet. He is my homage. I name him *Bombe Glacée à la Poole*!"

The door clapped and he was gone.

The telephone bell rang. Miss Gigg, unmoved, continued her recital.

"—and there's a telegram come for Mr. Poole. Shall I send it on or wait till he comes?"

"Poole, Poole, Poole!" moaned Koko Fry, his hands at his ears. "Give it a rest!"

Horrie Pedler took up the receiver.

"Hullo!" said she. "Miss Pedler speaking. You, Rosalba? Don't say you're not coming! What? What?"

Faintly to her ears came the voice of Rosalba Fennell—Rosalba, the actress of the hour.

"Darling Horrie—but of course I'm coming. I've been dreaming of him all night, I'm so thrilled. But I just thought I'd better ask —always safer, isn't it, darling? Who exactly *is* Marmion Poole?"

CHAPTER TWO — A POET ABROAD

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth . . .

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

MARMION POOLE!

Behold him, strolling as through worlds not realised, adown the hurrying plebeian streets! Behold the very sun shining as if with special enjoyment on his bare, brown-gold head! As he walked these streets, so he would have chosen to walk through life, sun-warmed, unhurried, observant. There was but one drawback—the streets took him for granted. They did not pause to admire: they cast him for that most unsuitable rôle—one of a crowd. It was a part that he could never play in London or in life: and his present insignificance worried him. These passers-by could not know that he was Marmion Poole, and he was sorry for them. Nevertheless, his boyish face, his northern colouring, his well-made body, his excellent clothes, his light walk, his swinging, amber-topped cane—these, at least, could and should be noticed by those who watched him in his walks abroad; while the delicate crow's-feet about the eyes, the deep-cut lines from nose to the small mouth, the betraying middle-aged texture of the skin—these, he was aware, were, in the open, less

easily remarked. He walked along well satisfied.

Still Rosalba Fennell's very reasonable question remains unanswered. Who exactly was Marmion Poole?

A man of letters: a man of the world: an Englishman, returning now after many years to the country from which a series of Byronic adventures had long ago driven him. Indeed, Byronic was an epithet which came unavoidably to the mind considering Marmion Poole. Those sprawling, witty novels in verse, their hero so recognisably bestriding the narrow world like a Colossus with a pose and a swagger that annoyed the elderly and charmed the young: the songs, the sonnets, the limericks, the famous *Farewell*, the gaudy, wasp-sting letters: all these were in the very manner of his prototype.

Other things, too, were in Byron's manner. Marmion Poole, if he had not the title and the small classic head, had the charm. They had not been able to resist him, those Edwardian ladies; great ladies, some of them, who stood to lose much by surrender. They had had full warning; they knew, by report of a hundred kind friends, what he was and what they must expect in the end if they listened to the amber voice. Yet many yielded; and to as many he was faithless. But the list grew at last too long; it became evident that Marmion Poole was not simply the adorer, but the challenger of a sex. He did not only kiss, he told: not

by word of mouth, of course; but when he wrote a play—and he wrote two or three that were fashionably witty and wittily fashionable—his female models were a little too recognisable; so that at last an infuriated husband put the matter in a solicitor's hands, and Marmion Poole found himself facing the wrong sort of publicity. He did not face it long. The threatened sex, gathering its weakness, won by very frailty. Marmion Poole was driven from England; which done, many of the avengers talked fire and brimstone in their drawing-rooms, and, ascending afterwards to less public regions, cried themselves plain.

Thus, in Edwardian England, was re-enacted the history of Orpheus and the mænads; except that Marmion Poole, though torn by tongues and dismembered in many a tea-table colloquy, did not die. He merely disappeared, and, to the chagrin of his opponents, continued to write rather better than before. From his corner of the earth, wherever it might be—for, save Horrie, nobody knew—he dispatched at intervals books that kept his memory alive. They were fresh, they were witty, and they had an enormous vogue; indeed, they made a legend for him. As the legend grew and the Edwardian ladies sank into impregnable middle age, the betrayer became the celebrity. No fewer than seventeen ladies were pointed at, envied, as having been his first love. Curiosity about him began to stir, memories of him to take alluring shapes. It was the turn of the

tide, and Marmion prided himself in triumph as in defeat on abiding by the movements of the tide.

Besides, Horrie Pedler had told him to come home ; and he, in common with her innumerable friends, always did what Horrie Pedler told him.

For Horrie collected friends.

Most men and a few women possess the collecting instinct. Some are sane on all subjects save only Payne bindings ; some lose their judgment, on the other hand, over tram-tickets, birds' eggs, snuff-boxes, horses' ornaments, armour, old prints, Rembrandts, cigarette pictures, Roman glass, stamps. Some even collect ideas.

Horatia Pedler, publisher, collected friends. Enemies she had too, but they were few, and they had seldom met her. They were, indeed, enemies not so much of comfortable Horrie Pedler as of her outrageous success. It is bitter to some minds, that will rejoice at the rise of a friend, to hear of a stranger's luck. Yet luck was not the word for Horrie's progress. She knew what it was to struggle as well as the humblest running girl in her office, and better. Life had been harder for single women —plain, penniless, and devouringly ambitious —when Horrie Pedler was a girl, than her trim young clerks—with their good wages, neat tunics, latch-keys, and liberty—would ever have the imagination to conceive. And she remained indeed, in the heyday of success,

still the rebel house-daughter of the 'nineties that she had once been, lifted giddily to her present heights by hard work, ambition, and a wistful fingering love of books, reinforced by whole-hearted worship of the strange temperament that produced them. She believed in the Artistic Temperament, did Horrie: and played Old-Woman-who-Lived-in-a-Shoe to all who could persuade her that they possessed it.

But even the most distinguished publishing house cannot live by literary bread alone. The Pedlar's Pack owed its proud position to the fact that its mistress, though she knew a book and a writer of quality when she met either, also knew a best seller.

There had been a time when gaudy jackets, gaudier contents, had been starved Horrie's mental food, sleep, and sunshine; when she had kept her soul alive on Blue Lagoons and Treasure Islands. That was during the interminable years of apprenticeship in a struggling, purposeless concern, part stationer's, part bookseller's, that took in petty printing much as a burdened housewife takes in extra washing, to make ends meet. Horrie was verging on middle age, too poor to marry, with the desire to do so, never strong in her, long outlived, when she won in a newspaper competition a considerable sum of money, and, her best sellers coming true in this fashion, she resolved upon appropriate adventure. The entire sum was recklessly squandered on a dingy shoplet near the British Museum, and upon a small

press with fine type. She printed for private venturers till her money turned over in its sleep, then put the narrow profits into four books. Horrie Pedler backed, not the writers, but herself, her knowledge, her taste, her dreams, her midnight oil, her awareness of her own luck. The first book nearly wrecked her, for she had paid high and unwisely for a formidable name that did not sell. The second was the demanded novel of every circulating library in the kingdom and is now dead. The third was sensationally banned. The fourth was *The Devil's Buttonhole* by Marmion Poole.

Half a dozen publishers had turned down *The Devil's Buttonhole* before Horrie Pedler printed it, and she set herself and its author on the way to success. That success was too much for him when it came made no difference to Horrie Pedler; she found it much easier to manage his affairs and get work out of him for their mutual benefit when he had bidden an ungrateful country farewell. Indeed, she printed the *Farewell* on fine hand-made paper, with a fore- and after-piece by the as yet uncelebrated, unknighted John Vetch; and very well it paid them all three. But she missed her fellow buccaneer heartily, and had no idea of letting him slide out of her busy and prosperous life. When the tide turned, who so pleased as Horrie Pedler to welcome back an old friend? An old friend out of favour with life hurt her like a gap in her private bookshelf. Books and friends were the two

possessions which Horrie, the generous, hated to lend, let alone give away. Behold her, then, in her glory, welcoming to lunch the thirty old friends and new friends she had gathered about her. Between them they would make Marmion Poole's well-advertised return a success.

They began making it a success at one-thirty : and they did it by making a noise. The thirty guests, with wide, conscious smiles, civilly roared at each other odds and ends of undistinguished conversation, refusing to waste any of their better things on the desert air of the ante-room, where draughts, greetings, and the impending announcement of a meal destroyed repose. They exchanged ejaculations and bandied inanities much as lawn-tennis champions indifferently knock the ball about while awaiting the umpire's word to play. Amid the din, Horrie, seizing hands, smiling, bestowing kisses like double knocks, moved among her guests and was happy. She had but one anxiety : how if Marmion, suddenly spurning and setting aside the whole plan, should make no appearance ? He was, as his old friend knew, only too capable of such a trick, and the possibility turned her cold. Marmion might decide not to be on show, might slink away from telephones and reminders to lunch alone, chuckling at the thirty poor lions without a Christian. Inapplicable as this last term was to Marmion, the situation was one to tempt him.

Horrie, as the clock hand neared the quarter,

could not help, over the heads of guests, looking her anxiety at her business manager, James Hereward Savory, ex-don, ex-officer, ex-author, whom the war had washed up in London high and dry, without a foot, a family, or a future. Inevitably he had drifted into Horrie's undertow, and, of all her recent lame dogs, he had most justified himself.

Yet, like many too much ill-treated dogs, he still wore in the days of peace and prosperity a surly air. "Get past Savory and you're safe!" ran the legend. But it was not easy to get past the watch-dog Savory, as the authoress of *Touch Last with an Emir* discovered. For Savory, observing that Horrie looked at him afflictedly, as she listened to an anecdote that she had already printed once in a seven-and-sixpenny, once in a three-and-sixpenny, and seven times in cheap editions, removed his employer with the ruthlessness of one who had dealt faithfully with emirs not so long ago. Part of his service had been in the Near East.

"What's wrong?" growled the watch-dog.

"He's late," said Horrie.

"He's got till two." Savory glanced at the clock.

"Ah, but I told him one-thirty, just as a precaution," returned his employer. "And he's twenty minutes late by that, you see, already."

"Then he ought to be just in nice time."

"Yes—if he comes. Oh, he wouldn't be such a fool as to cut it, James, would he?"

" He'd like to make you think so, that's all," returned her manager, and turned to entertain a minor muse dressed in chintz.

" So kind," said the lady, who wrote novels of the wild West and wilder East.

" So good," said Savory, welcoming.

" So naughty," said the lady, indicating her half-empty cocktail glass.

" So glad," mechanically returned the manager ; and glanced again toward the door, while the talk swelled to a noise as of falling waters. Horrie smiled, circulated, was greeted, smiled ; and finally was hailed by Sir John Buller, the dramatic critic, among whose unperformed pieces the one banned by the censor on the life of the Prince Consort ranked high in popular esteem.

" Well, Horrie ? " said Sir John, with the tact that endeared him to his club and his public. " What have you done with him ? I suppose it's a fake. I wouldn't have come if I'd known."

" What, Marmion ? " Horrie answered. " Oh, Marmion's all right. He'll be here by two."

" I hope so," rejoined her guest, looking with disfavour on Rosalba Fennell, who paused for an instant by her hostess to condole. The chief guest's absence had been remarked by others than Sir John.

Horrie rejected condolence bravely, but she could feel grey disappointment settling like fine dust upon her spirits, and feared that the dust would spread. Her head ached with willing

Marmion to arrive. She pushed at her hat impatiently. She was not a good wearer of hats.

"Well, I begin to wish he'd come," she said at last plaintively. "I want to take off my hat."

"My dear, you can't!" said Rosalba, who would as soon have removed her make-up. Then, for she was tolerant of eccentricity up to a point, as one who suggests a not dishonourable compromise, "But I tell you what we'll do—we'll take off the price."

And she removed a white ticket that depended from it, on which, in large gold letters, were written the words "French goods." The hostess submitted, unresentful. Her mind was elsewhere. It was, indeed, visualising with extreme accuracy the progress through London of Marmion Poole. She surmised that he would be amusing himself by correctly visualising in turn his hostess's consternation.

She was right. He was doing so at that moment, undeterred by any flicker of conscience, since he proposed to turn up in the end. He enjoyed wasting Horrie's minutes—power was power however it came and whatever form it assumed. Deliberately he lingered before windows that another time he would have passed with a shudder, windows of electricians filled with sombre and complex appliances, windows of vast shops wherein were displayed suitcases, bicycles, feminine underwear, and jam. He smiled at a beggar standing by the curb and gave the man a ten-shilling note. That man would remember him, wonder about him. Worth

the money, thought Marmion Poole, and, as a clock struck the three-quarters, laughed so loudly that an old lady from Ealing, who had been shopping all the morning for a married niece in Wiltshire, started at sight of his face and hurried into an A.B.C. shop, where, in her alarm, she added to her order for poached eggs the formula : " Ladies' outsize ! "

Unaware of this minor tragedy, Marmion Poole continued to stroll. He could, he thought, afford to arrive at two. Already he wanted his lunch quite badly ; and for a moment the door of a restaurant tempted him, but he refrained. Horrie's food, even cold, even insulted by delay, would be better than such a casual meal—bad dreams of cooking, in which incidents of the previous day were served up anew, disguised yet recognisable, with a sinister sauce. At a wide cross-roads the traffic stream halted him ; and as he waited in the sun a great sigh of content lifted his admirable waistcoat. He was in England once more, a country for which, do what he would, he retained a tenderness, such a feeling as might linger in the heart of Don Juan revisiting Cadiz. Once more he was considerable, a great man, a legend : yet no creed outworn, as the new stuff would show. He laughed again at the thought of what lay hidden in the parcel he bore.

Strictly it was not a parcel. In his life Marmion Poole had never carried a parcel, and the homely yet stimulating word could not be applied to that which lay in the crook of his arm.

It was a rectangular, book-shaped sheath of old brocade into which a typescript might slip and be hidden. He deplored the crude colouring, the unimaginative lettering of the typed sheet, but that it was inevitable he realised: and, since he could not send forth his work in the dignity of a fine and delicate handwriting, it was his custom to present it for publication thus enclosed, that his thoughts, set out of necessity in the commercial convention, at least might walk in beauty.

As he fingered the brocade the policeman beckoned; and a stream of dammed-up vehicles went flooding east and west. Marmion Poole, too, obeyed the beckoning arm, and, pursuing his way, came to the door of No. 49 just before two. Yet he would not enter. Smiling, his eyes on his watch, he waited, the object of an errand-boy's astonishment, and not till its hands stood on the very stroke did he press the bell.

CHAPTER THREE

BOMBE GLACÉE À LA POOLE

Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

"MR. MARMION POOLE!" The instant silence that saluted this announcement was a tribute more real than applause. He savoured it, standing in the doorway, surveying the celebrated faces turned toward him, noting those that were known to him. Few new stars, it seemed, had risen in fifteen years: a fact creditable to the British public, whose attitude to its favourites reflected the householder of Salt Lake City rather than of Constantinople. It took them in numbers, but lawfully, and did not bowstring them when their charm and their fertility were past.

There was time for all to see his smile before old friends strove clamorously toward him, greeting, clapping him on the shoulders, taking the chance of his hand. Marmion could find no time to phrase his greetings. They came tumbling out pell-mell in a spate of words, exclamations, and laughter, spontaneous, astonishing to himself. It was years since he had left any phrase unfinished, and the fact that he did so now was a measure of his satisfaction as he saw round him the welcoming faces of the old-stagers. The knights of the arts were prominent. Sir John Vetch, who had decorated the *Farewell* so many

years ago; Sir John Whittington, who had already been at work on the novel that placed him when he and Marmion walked together in the Pyrenees; Sir John Buller, who had helped Poole's comedies by thunderous d nunciations happily timed; Sir John Saumarez, who had played in them. Marmion toyed with the problem—would their undoubted virtues have received the accolade if they had not been christened by the most reliable of names?

"There is much virtue in John," thought Marmion Poole, who would not have taken a knighthood for all the world could offer, but would have enjoyed refusing it. Still, he was glad to see them, and glad that their years showed more plainly than his. Johnnie Whittington was grey-haired now; Johnnie Buller was shorn of his beard, though still recognisable by his habit of whistling Valkyrie music through his teeth when excited; Johnnie Saumarez had worn best; he still carried himself well and was not overshadowed by an attractive dark young wife; but Johnnie Vetch had grown stout and bourgeois. And there was Adela Sprowle elbowing into the extreme foreground, and shaking hands twice over; and Algernon Lundy, unchanged too, save that the tufts of hair, which as side-whiskers used to shade his cheek, had shifted their ground and combined to form a neat imperial.

Marmion surveyed them, his left arm pressing the brocade square closer. He waved aside the offer of K. K. Fry to relieve him of it, and

sought, over the shoulders of the oldsters, the unfamiliar, different, curious faces of a younger generation. He looked with interest at the large vigorous young women and the sensitive slender young men ; they intrigued him mightily. Then he turned to Horrie—Horrie who delighted in him, who was openly proud of him, who smiled at him and them all with her hat at the back of her head. He smiled back at her, and she burst into triumphant speech.

" Look at him," she cried to those nearest, " not a grey hair ! Isn't it marvellous ! Isn't he just the same as ever ? "

" Rubbish ! " screamed Mrs. Fenwick Sprowle, removing with one large gesture two playwrights and a diaphanous young composer from her path. " He's punctual."

" Was I not always punctual ? " Marmion appealed.

Horrie crowed with laughter.

" You were not," she said. " But I asked you half an hour too early. I always had to. You don't mind, do you ? "

Mrs. Sprowle screamed again with amusement. But Marmion had turned to answer another old friend and did not reply.

" Ah, Marmion," Sir John Whittington was saying in his tired, beautiful voice, " how many years since Andorra ? Nineteen-nine."

" My dear John," Marmion answered, twinkling, " there was no such year."

" Perhaps not," Sir John agreed. " But I'm getting to the age when men start to brag about

their years. Why do we do it? No credit to us! Eh, Billy? Eh, Milly?"

He turned to the boy and girl who had emerged from the back row of gazers and stood arm in arm observing their elders in talk. They were of a height, and their faces reflected each other. Their charm was not only of their youth, but of their period. Marmion tasted it like a new wine, as Mrs. Sprowle hurried the newcomers into the charmed circle and rearranged them in front of him.

"Milly Boxe," said she—"and Billy Boxe. You remember their father, of course—Alastair Boxe."

Marmion held out his hand. The Honorable Milly removed the arm which Mrs. Sprowle had thrown affectionately about her thin shoulders, and looked first at the lady and then at the celebrity, with wide wicked kitten's eyes.

"Mr. Poole," said she, "is wondering why on earth we were asked, darling. You left off the labels."

"Unnecessary," said he. "In my prehistoric day there were only two labels—girls were pretty or they were bores."

"Poor loves," said Milly Boxe. "Fancy always having to be out after men."

"It must have been hell," her brother confirmed, nodding. "But *we're* getting it now."

"He means," said Milly Boxe, ingenuously explaining, "men nowadays have such a fearful lot to compete with—cars and planes and Parliaments and writing and doctoring and selling

antiques ! We don't really need them any more except for dancing and "—she blinked while she sought a further *raison d'être* for men—" oh, and babies," she ended.

" Back numbers, in fact ! " said Marmion, his lips mocking the phrase. A legend he might be, but no chit should call him a fogy. But—were they chits ? He remembered a paragraph in his morning's paper—something to do with a speed record—flight record—that these children had achieved. They suddenly said in chorus, as he pondered :

" We like your stuff."

" Do you ? " said he, amused. " There's nothing in it about machinery."

" That's why," they answered simultaneously, and beamed. Marmion perceived on a flash of enlightenment that in their eyes he was staging the return of Merlin. Hoary he might be, but a magician to them nevertheless. He beamed in his turn, and the other young, seeing that their representatives had made a success, surged forward.

K. K. Fry, observing, listening, noting with all his might, found himself stating the scene and its meaning, indeed the whole eventful luncheon, in terms of the boxing ring. Poole Senior versus Young Poole—reality versus legend. " Senior's Bid for Belt ! Can He Come Back ? " wondered Koko, in the headlong headlines of the sporting Press ; but as yet he could draw no conclusion from the eager faces of the young, the friendly, measuring glances of their elders.

The gong sounded; the fight was on. In everyday phrasing, luncheon was announced, and Horrie gathered the half-dozen guests who were nearest, Marmion among them, and herded them through the door. The remainder followed with a readiness which proved, if such a truism needed proof, that conversation and cocktails, those modern equivalents of hunger, can rival even that primal sensation as sauce for a meal.

The long table was spread in a room that for two hundred years had known such gatherings as these. Gentlemen in the days of Queen Anne had sat down to mackerel dressed with gooseberries, turkey poults fried in batter, and perhaps a syllabub. Georgian gentlemen had eaten beefsteaks from hot plates that had been rubbed with a shallot; while Victorian gentlemen had enjoyed undistinguished copious meals of the kind described with such zest by their novelists. Its panelling of straw-coloured oak, its solitary picture of a lady in green velvet inset above the mantelpiece, made no demands on the attention; the table had always been the focus of the room, and after two centuries it was still the focus, though the decorations were simple enough. In the centre stood ranked beakers and other fantasies of blue glass—Horrie was a collector in her way—and at either end a semicircle of camellias set in a filigree of smilax lay strewn upon the polished wood. Horrie, taking the head of her board, looking down on her fine linen, twinkling with glass and silver, felt that she

carried on tradition, and was no interloper in the house of those greedy and magnificent gentlemen. She was proud, she was happy, and she had every confidence in Ulysse as she picked up the tiny menu card that stood in front of her.

"Bombe Glacée à la Poole!" she read aloud, leaning towards Marmion. "That's my cook's tribute to you."

"What is it?" he asked, taking the menu from her.

"I don't know," said she. "It's his own invention. Marmion, what are you doing?"

For he had turned sideways in his chair to deposit on the floor his square of brocade, whose significance Horrie, at last, had leisure to appreciate.

"Marmion!" she cried, exulting. "Oh, Marmion, tell me! An MS.? Yours? New stuff? Let me put it somewhere safe."

"No, no!" said he, smiling, and checking with his hand the butler's movement. "Leave it, it's comfortable; the only footstool I'd ever care to use."

Eliza Point, who had had an evangelical upbringing, lifted her face from her interesting soup.

"Enemies thy footstool, eh?" said she. "What's the book about, Marmion?"

"Enemies——?" began Horrie uneasily.

"No, no," he soothed her, "only memories——" He broke off suddenly. "Ah, you wretch!"

"Who?" said Horrie startled. "Me?"

He did not answer in words, but stretched forward and took up a camellia that lay near him, which he held before her eyes like a French examining magistrate confronting a murderer with a body.

"Do you know what that is?" he asked her sternly.

"A camellia," she answered faintly, "but I didn't think you'd mind. They're such artificial flowers, Marmion. I didn't want great vases that people can't see over."

"A camellia," said he, catching her up, "—a crime!" Then, to the butler, bending over him, concerned—"Water, quickly!"

"And the big bowl," commanded Horrie, resigned. For she knew what she had done. She knew Marmion Poole's passion. But she had imagined that camellias, those tailored flowers with their sophisticated scent, might go unpitied. She had been wrong.

"Flowers, please!" said Marmion to Eliza Point. "Pass them up to me, will you?"

She stretched out a hand and passed him three or four. Other people, laughing, followed suit, until Horrie Pedler's table decorations lay in a pile of green and waxen white in front of the guest of honour, who, having tweaked their stems and arranged their leaves, settled them one by one, carefully, in the big glass bowl.

So passed the consommé. Round One, as Koko's thoughts expressed it, of Marmion's come-back effort was over, creditably over. Senior was showing unexpected form. He had

them guessing, thought Koko, and that was half the battle. That packet beneath his feet, inexplicable, challenging, noted by the whole table—when would he use it and how? Decidedly on points Senior had the best of it in Round One.

The talk drifted on, reflecting other egotisms. Sir John Saumarez, for example, was pensive; and when Sir John was pensive his thoughts pervaded the surrounding air to an extent that inevitably compelled his neighbours to bid for them a respectful though inadequate penny. In the present case it was Rosalba Fennell, at his right hand, who made the offer.

"I don't know," said Sir John Saumarez, "why I should bore you with reminiscence; but the fact is, to-day is the anniversary of my wedding." And he looked down at the spray of myrtle with whimsical appreciation of his own display of sentiment. Rosalba, as a result, instantly ceased to be interested in Sir John. She perceived, to her disappointment, that he was amiable, suave, and quite unlikely to beat or be rude to her. Rosalba had already, at the age of twenty-three, devastated two continents in her vain search for a truly manly man. Ardently she wished to be treated like dirt; but whenever, pleading for such treatment, she lifted her delicious eyes to men, they wilted, stammered, and ended in slavish attitudes at her feet. So she said vaguely:

"Really? How dreadful for you!"—and turned to Philibert Foulger on her left.

She had hopes of him which rose high when, leaning across to Sir John Saumarez, he said :

"Is that magnificently boring play of yours still running, Sir John?"

Sir John did not need to nod. Of course the play was running. Plays with which he was concerned did run, like competitors in a relay race handing on from one to another the torch of success.

"Because," said Philibert Foulger superbly, "I've got something you ought to have. And yet I don't know. It needs acting."

"My dear fellow," Sir John murmured, "of course it needs acting. All those pale, thoughtful plays without any action do. But that's our job," said Sir John bravely, "we actors ; we are expected to make bricks without straw!"

"Could I see your play?" Rosalba asked timidly.

Philibert Foulger looked at her for the first time, insolently. She returned his look with one of admiration. Philibert Foulger began to feel less sure of himself. She smiled. Philibert Foulger became aware of a longing to fight several people at once, and afterwards to read her his play himself. She saw the inevitable change coming ; sighed her disillusion ; and devoted her whole attention to her food. But the table was intrigued. Rosalba was young. Rosalba was the rage ; and not once had she shot a glance at Marmion Poole.

With the removal of the aspic plates, there ended Round Two, Poole Senior having had very

much the worst of it. Horrie, beside him, still smiled ; but in her eyes was an expression both bewildered and angry that Koko had seen before. He remembered an occasion when the Press had severely rapped the knuckles of one of her protégés, and her eyes, as she read one after another the stinging notices, had had just that look. He remembered her voice—" But they haven't understood. Oh, it's not fair ! " Things were not going well when Horrie looked like that.

K. K. Fry mentally lengthened the odds on Poole Senior, and turned his attention to Round Three, the duckling, and the conversation of Canaletta Fauve.

Canaletta Fauve was enormous, a Frenchwoman, flamboyant, insincere, and shrewd. She placed Mr. Fry instantly ; and, finding him intelligent enough to make sport, proceeded with her favourite game of cat and mouse, the mouse represented by any topic he might care to select.

" You're a dramatist, madame," said Koko Fry deferentially. " I suppose you've been giving our theatre the once-over ? "

" You 'ave no drama," replied Madame Fauve. " You 'ave instead morals."

" Don't you believe it," returned Koko Fry, stung. " What about Barker's Bare-legged Beauties ? "

" Bare legs," repeated Madame Fauve—" yes, wid music, wid buffonerie to make it alri'. But a serious leg, a leg—'ow shall I say—passionate ? Is that permit ? "

And she laughed scornfully. Koko, snubbed,

let his eye rove to the head of the table, trying to follow there the fortunes of Poole Senior. He was not talking, nor was he eating. Talk flowed about him, but he sat silent, the clear features dispassionately benevolent as those of a carved god ; his physical grace had often served him, and he used it now skilfully—the smile, the turn of the head, the eyes blue as a Mediterranean sky. Koko Fry heard a comment or two.

"How marvellously good-looking Mr. Poole is!"

"One begins to believe the stories——"

"Ah, my dear lady, but you should have seen him twenty years ago!"

And, that answer of Algernon Lundy's having summed up the table's impression, the talkers forgot Marmion once more.

Another point to Young Poole, thought the watcher ; but Senior's got that packet still. When's he going to use it? What's in it?

Then, amid the chatter, even his own thoughts ceased to be audible.

"Eliza"—Mrs. Fenwick Sprowle was shouting across the table—"why don't you send in a few little things for my 'Woman of To-day' page? A little article or two!"

"I lack the touch," called back Eliza Point, without enthusiasm.

"Dear thing, I'd tidy them up for you, of course!" screamed Mrs. Fenwick Sprowle.

"Dearest," returned Eliza Point, "I'm so apt to quote Latin in my articles. Do you think

your wives and mothers would care for it ? Try Miss Pringle."

Selina Pringle heard and was hurt. Already she had been terrified by the ponderous courtesy of Sir John Whittington, cowed by the connoisseurship of Algernon Lundy, who in a remote voice—he could not afford to know the demi-known—had inquired her opinion of Russian films. She had in her extreme nervousness drunk at random from the glasses by her plate, and thus had contrived for herself the strangest impromptu cocktail, whose ingredients were equal parts of sherry, hock, and claret. She drank from yet another glass as Eliza Point's thrust went home, blushed to the eyes, and brooded, struggling against a faint, inexplicable longing to confide in somebody, that crept upon her insidious as sleep.

The duckling plates were cleared away. K. K. Fry glanced at the menu, and, looking up, saw Marmion Poole glance at it too, and set back his shoulders. Plenty of fight left in him yet, thought K. K. Fry : and with some excitement he anticipated Round Four, the sweet, that *pièce de résistance* of the meal. Others too, perhaps, were conscious of a tension. Whatever the cause, a half silence fell, into which launched the wounded voice of Selina Pringle, confiding, to her own astonishment and inward horror, in Sir John Whittington.

" I don't see why she says that. Because, you know, they all say at home I'm terribly modern. Oh, they think I'm awful. This is

my second husband now that I'm living with—George. I had to get rid of my first. Well, you see, he joked so, he was always joking. Never any peace. So I got rid of him. But he still comes to see me on Sundays. Well, why not? I'm used to him. George likes him. He makes George laugh. What is there so modern in that?"

She broke off. Her somewhat clouded vision had perceived the entrance on silver dishes of those bowers of green which were the tribute of one artist to another. She prodded Sir John's arm confidentially.

"Look!" she whispered, reverting to her first condition of simple awe. "Bombe Glacée à la Poole!"

The bowers were, as might be guessed, ices of a delicate green. Asparagus juices had flavoured and tinted them. From their hollow centres asparagus drooped, falling like the plumes of spray from a fountain. With them intricately shaped cheese biscuits were served. A strange dish, and very fairly emblematical of Marmion's work: neither sweet nor savoury, but having the consistency of one and the tang of the other. It was a true inspiration such as the guests appreciated; and they devoured it with well-bred greed. Talk rose above the tinkle of their spoons, satisfying to the normal ear, but to the ear of Horrie, giver of good parties, something lacked in its quality. The old-stagers were right enough; it was the young whose attitude disturbed her. Could it be that they, who had

so loved and followed the legend, were disappointed in the man? Was Young Poole to be victor after all? Horrie would not tolerate it. Unhesitating, she rushed into the fray, singling out, as scapegoat and spokesman for the young, the diaphanous young composer who was at the moment engaged in retailing to a sympathetic coeval his sufferings at the hands of one Vincent Schuyler, a pianist.

"Well, he had this thing of mine for a week," said the composer. "Then one night he came to me and said he couldn't manage it. 'But, my lost soul,' I said, 'what's wrong with it? It's perfectly simple.' He said it might be for a centipede; but he hadn't got enough fingers. 'Fingers?' I said. 'My dear, don't be delicious! It's played with the flat of the hand.'"

He was illustrating the movement with surprising vigour and to the considerable danger of Horrie's old English glasses, when his hostess's voice, breezing down the table, checked his genial fire.

"Ben," she called, "what's the matter with you all? Why aren't you enjoying yourselves?"

The composer looked wildly upon his mates, and swallowed too hastily the wrong end of the asparagus he held between his spatulate finger and thumb; and murmured confusedly that he was enjoying himself terribly, and might he have a glass of water, please.

"I mean"—Horrie swept on—"what's the

matter? Don't you like Ulysse's effort, or don't you like Marmion?"

Marmion, listening with lifted eyebrows to this tirade, caught the eye of Selina Pringle, who, with an apologetic grimace, returned his glance. They laughed, mutually understanding. Enthralled, Koko leaned forward to watch their faces. This, surely, was the opening for which Senior had waited. The punch was coming soon.

"Is it that?" Marmion called to her down the table.

At the word all heads turned in her direction, like vanes blown by a strong wind. And then a silence fell to catch Selina's response.

"Oh, you know what it is," Selina giggled. She was twice a wife, thrice a mother, and five times an author; but she could never in public behave otherwise than as a schoolgirl. Marmion began to laugh.

"You tell 'em," said he—and laughed again, enjoying the spectacle of the younger generation having its hour. Selina, dizzy with triumph, swaying like a pythoness inspired, told them.

"You haven't got a pose," she wailed. "And it isn't fair, when we'd looked forward so."

Her hand dropped. She giggled. Her hour was over. She was Selina Pringle once more, incapable of consolidating her position. Milly Boxe caught the conversational sceptre as it fell from her nerveless hand.

"Well, I like him like that," said Milly, dispassionately considering the object of their

discussion ; and Marmion responded with complete gravity :

" So do I. Extraordinarily comfortable to be oneself."

" Ah," returned Milly, " that's what we've found out."

" But," interrupted her brother, " we did think it was our discovery. If you've found it out already——"

" Yes, when did you ? " demanded his sister.

" I know," murmured Horrie. She had indeed realised the recentness of the new poseless pose that had been his response to the challenge of the young. He had seen himself mirrored in the ingenuous eyes of the flying infants as a fogy, and had instantly resolved to make fogydom the fashion. Well, he was doing it. He was being very much more human than any of them—artless, defenceless, letting them in on all his secrets.

" Got 'em ! Follow it up ! Follow it up ! " urged Koko in a whisper, to the astonishment of Canaletta Fauve, whose last remark—" and so zere 'e quit me, and after I pay for 'is bath too " —seemed to demand no such comment. Marmion followed up. He, too, knew that this was the beginning of the end—victory.

" When ? " he was returning. " Well, it began when I went away. You were in your cradles, of course. I began to understand the tragedy of the rolling stone, so bare, so flinty. Ugh ! I resolved to be unique in natural history. I collected—moss ! Doesn't it show ? "

That, conceded K. K. Fry, was the knockout. It was not the words, nor the smile, nor the simple friendliness of his tone, but something in the combination of all three that won him his youngsters. They began to laugh, and, laughing, liked him vociferously, craned toward him, flinging questions and comments and the affectionate insults of modern hero-worship. Poole Senior had come back, triumphantly. He was now, to the young, both a legend and a personal god. A great man, Poole, thought K. K. Fry, bewitched like the rest of his contemporaries, noisy as they.

Sir John Whittington sat back elaborately in his chair. He had no one to talk to ; nor had Sir John Buller ; nor had Sir John Vetch ; nor, monstrously, Sir John Saumarez ; for Lady Saumarez had gone over to the stranger with the whole-heartedness of her years.

This Horrie distressedly observed. Her welcome to her celebrity was now only too successful. Her party was being overbalanced by young folk who did not, for all their enthusiasm, weigh more than troy ounces against avoirdupois ounces in the scales of worldly success. But she knew her Marmion. The moment, especially the flattering moment, was all in all to that particular artistic temperament. She would get no help from him. Help, however, was the last thing that Horrie sought from any client, poet or male. So she smiled at the amiable Sir John Whittington, shrugged disarmingly as she caught the eye of Sir John Saumarez, and

collected the interest of all the women by the simple expedient of taking off her hat and, casting it behind her as if it were salt to disarm a house-fairy, pushed a full dish of devilled almonds toward Sir John Buller, a programme, a BB. pencil, and a breathed "Please" to Sir John Vetch; and rose upon her speech of welcome.

It was a good speech: a little breathless, but breezy: bohemian in manner, conventional in matter. Sir John Saumarez was soothed by the suggestion that the English stage would not be a success again until he had interpreted *Hamlet* for it in the costume of the year 2000. Philibert Foulger was implored to consider platform-wagon playing of modern morality plays, especially his own. The names of ingenuous Sir John Whittington and Emily Brontë were casually coupled: so were Canaletta Fauve and the Censor. Lady Fussell's advice on the redecoration of the staff quarters was gratefully mentioned, though the fact that it had not been followed was overlooked. A reference to Sir John Vetch's magnificent cubist sign-board for the outer hall led Horrie imperceptibly to modernity, to futurism, to youth in art and literature; and the younger generation was put, with a wink, in its place under the banner of that wandering Christian, the ever-young Marmion Poole. "Age cannot wither him nor custom stale——" remarked Horrie fervently, and left the end of the quotation to the clappers.

She as a publisher, indeed, could not help confessing, continued Horrie, as the noise died

down, that she deprecated this infinite variety. It might be very good for a reputation to write the most brilliant first novel of a decade, to supply for four years to a Sir John Saumarez the material for his successes, to turn from a sonnet sequence to a series of *vers libre*; but her business was to sell books. Had Mr. Poole not yet learned that the public liked its daily bread to be daily bread? that if you gave it a loaf on Monday you must not give it caviar on Tuesday, nor candied rose-leaves, nor salted almonds, nor birds'-nest soup? But Mr. Poole had as little mercy on his publishers as on his public, and she feared, from what he had whispered to her on his arrival, that his small share of that Philistine virtue was to be yet further strained. For he had confided that the latest manuscript was something, as far as he was concerned, "entirely new." However, she would leave him to confess to his own sins. Her task was ended when she had said—and the easy tears stood in Horrie's elderly eyes as she dropped suddenly to sincerity—"Welcome home again, dear Marmion!"

Marmion Poole rose as deliberately and as gracefully as a cat rising to greet a tolerated caress, and stood in smiling silence awaiting the termination of the applause which greeted him. Very well he looked. The pale oak panelling was good to him; and Horrie's window curtains softened the sincere criticism of June sunshine. Very well he looked: very pleasantly he smiled: and when he spoke his

words, his voice, his accompanying gesture, disarmed.

"Dear Horrie," said Marmion; and then, on a note of desperate appeal, "you know me. You all know me." He glanced round the table. "I'm no good at saying thank you. I never know how." He paused helplessly; his rueful smile filled the silence with success, and Selina Pringle was overheard to murmur: "I know who he's like: he's like George!" while Sir John Saumarez, recalling mutual triumphs long past, cried out suddenly, "My word, Marmion, it's great to have you back!"

But Horrie was firm. As Marmion appeared about to reseat himself, she cast her hat, long since retrieved for her by the attentive Billy, upon his vacated chair.

"No, you don't, Marmion!" said she. "Speech first."

The table re-echoed her:

"Speech! Speech!"

But Marmion continued to stoop. And not till he had had them silently waiting did he rise, pleasantly flustered, the book-shaped sheath of brocade in his hand.

"So here's my thanks," he said: and with an odd gesture, half surrender, half bestowal, handed the parcel to his hostess. "Thanks to you, Horrie!" said he. And then, turning from her, as his bold, laughing eyes swept the table, "Thanks to all my old—friends!"

"But what is it? Tell us!" The youngsters led the clamour in which, restored to good

humour by curiosity, their elders joined. Only Sir John Saumarez, whose job, as he had often explained to Lady Saumarez, was to observe the public actions of the artistic temperament, narrowed his eyes as if the dazzle of the old-fashioned gas footlights were obscuring his clear vision ; and Savory, whose job, as he had never explained to anyone, was to stand between the artistic temperament and his soft-hearted employer, stiffened suspiciously in his chair.

"Tell you?" Marmion had the air of one dangling a cork before kittens. "But it's nothing. Only a few prose papers. Nothing exciting. It's only"—his eye rested a moment on Canaletta Fauve—"only some memoirs of mine. I've always kept a diary, you know. And in the long years—lonely years, some of them—when day followed day with nothing fresh to record, my amusement was to re-read it. I would pick any odd date—let us say the thirteenth of February——"

Canaletta Fauve started.

"—or, shall we say, a May-day"—and his friendly gaze rested on the restless hands of Eliza Point, crumpling a camellia as she listened. "I'd say to myself, 'What was happening to me six, seven, ten years ago on the thirteenth of February or the first of May?' And then," said Marmion charmingly, "I'd find it written down: and after I'd read it over I'd write it up. It brought back my youth."

There was dead silence now. He waited, smiled.

"That's all," said Marmion. "Except," he added wistfully, "that I think it's my best piece of work." And then, "How arrogant you must all be thinking me, droning on about myself!"

"Go on!" roared the younger generation enthusiastically; and Selina breathed a "Why is it your best, Mr. Poole? Do tell us."

"Because," returned Marmion, "in twenty years I've learned this, my children. Art can't touch life. Fiction can't beat fact. The supreme artist is the man who, in the witness-box of art, tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And humble and clumsy as I am," said Marmion simply, "in these memoirs of mine, I can say at least—'I have told the truth.'"

And once more, with his all-embracing smile, he surveyed the table.

A change had come over it. If the young, avid of a new gospel, appeared vaguely disappointed by the reiteration of truisms that Marmion himself had long since taught them to despise, if they bore themselves, as they awaited the peroration, with something of the impatient reverence of the sightseer who, hasting to a wedding, is delayed by a funeral, the elders showed, on the other hand, by a certain erectness of bearing, that they were interested, very much interested. Koko Fry, watching the table, thought to himself that if reviews of the memoirs roused among the public anything like the almost savage rustle of curiosity

that their mention roused in Horrie's dining-room, then he could count on getting a Baby Austin out of the business at least. Thrilled, he leaned forward in turn.

"And may we be told what it's called?"

"Ah——" It was the composite sigh of half the table; and Horrie added eagerly:

"Yes, Marmion, what is it to be called? You're always so good at titles."

Marmion looked from one to another of his old friends, gently, caressingly, and his voice had the faintest intonation of hurt surprise.

"Called? Why, *Reflections*!" said Marmion Poole. And sat down in a deep silence.

CHAPTER FOUR — SORRY YOU HAVE BEEN TROUBLED

What, are you mad? I charge you, get you home.
OTHELLO

IT was fair morning some nineteen hours after Horrie Pedler's speech and Marmion Poole's reply. Horrie, that clockwork woman, sat as ever at her ugly Victorian desk, which was piled even higher than usual with letters. On the letters, in turn, were piled Press cuttings : indeed, Press cuttings were everywhere—on Horrie's lap, on the mantelpiece, on the floor ; while two or three dangled from the hands of Horrie's vizier, James Hereward Savory, comfortably chaired at her side.

" MARMION POOLE TELLS ! " Horrie Pedler read aloud to the grimly smiling Savory. " That's the headline in the *Sun*. Koko really has done us very well," she went on, holding the paper at a distance the better to observe the impressive height of the type. " That boy's worth his weight in treasury notes."

" He's no fool," Savory admitted, less grudgingly than was his habit.

" I'm glad you think so," said Horrie. " Could you work with him ? "

" I can work with anybody who pulls his weight," he retorted.

" He'll do that. . . . You know, James," said Horrie Pedler abruptly, " I'm getting on."

" It's been a record year for the Pack," said Savory, not understanding.

" I'm not talking about the Pack's years," Horrie caught him up. " I'm talking of my own years. When I say I'm getting on, James, I mean I'm getting old."

Savory laughed, and made a comparison drawn from one of the scenes of his soldiering.

" So are the Pyramids," said he.

" Well," said Horrie, flattered, " thank you, James ! I've never had a compliment from you before. But I want to talk to you seriously. I'm competent, I know ; I've got my wits about me still. That's why I'm going to hand over the reins before it gets too much for me."

" Hand over the reins ? " said Savory, aghast. " Who to ? "

" You, among others," Horrie answered, and turned to a cutting in salmon pink. But the self-possessed Savory, ex-major, ex-don, imperturbable protector of his employer against herself, was completely taken aback. Slowly he flushed, sitting like a schoolboy before this shrewd and foolish woman, and found nothing whatever to say to her. Indeed, there was nothing to be said. Savory had no use for words. He traded in words, reckoned in words, launched words in millions upon the world, lived, moved, and had his being among words : nevertheless he had no use for them in emergencies.

" You see," Horrie went on wistfully, " I've watched it. I've seen other women—men too !

Heavens, the men who don't let go! It has always seemed to me one of the tragedies of the people who get there. They dig in their toes and cling on by their teeth, and say, 'I won't grow old.' Well, of course that's nonsense," said Horrie, briskly returning to earth. "Because they do grow old, and they wobble and lose ground more and more, until finally they topple out of their jobs into their graves; and everybody says, 'About time, too!' I'm not going to have that said of me."

"You're different," said Savory.

"No, my dear James," Horrie answered, "I'm not. As Koko would say—'Anno Domini is everybody's middle name.' And I'm not going to have the Pack going down in the world because I'm beginning to stoop. If my shoulders aren't strong enough I shall distribute the weight."

"A company?"

"A company. I'll go on as managing director, of course, for a while. The others will be—yourself—Koko——"

"Fry? He's young. He's had no experience out of Fleet Street."

"You were a colonel at twenty-seven," Horrie reminded him. "Of course we'll have to keep an eye on him; but I believe in Koko. He's got zest and zeal, and he's original——"

"Anyone else?" Savory interrupted.

"One more," she answered. "The picturesque figure. The standard-bearer. The great name."

Savory looked at her, his brows wrinkled. She smiled and tapped the cutting that she held.

"Marmion Poole," said Horrie, "of course! That's what I've haled him home for. Well?" But she got no answer. She was accustomed to the impassivity of her business manager and knew its degrees. There was stillness, and there was absolute stillness, and there was wood. It was the wooden face now.

"What's the matter?" she asked, amused. "Isn't Marmion grand enough for you?" And without waiting for an answer she began to read aloud from the columns of the *Fife*:

"'All literary London gathered to-day at the Pedlar's Pack, as 49 Vandeleur Street is affectionately known, to greet Marmion Poole, just back after a long absence. Mr. Poole is, of course, one of our foremost writers, and before the war was well known in society as a wit-about-town. I heard from one of the lucky lunchers that his new book is to be called *Reflections*. As his memory is said to be devastatingly good, we may all look forward to shocks in the autumn.'"

"Yes," said Savory doubtfully, "that's all right, but——"

"And this," Horrie interrupted, taking up another cutting, "listen to this from this morning's *Jew's Harp*:

"'Poole Reflects! Marmion Poole, whose return to England has been the outstanding social and literary event of the month, surprised

his friends yesterday by announcing that he was going to tell the truth about them all in a volume of memoirs. Mr. Poole has known everybody in London worth knowing, and this announcement has fluttered even the innermost circle. It is rumoured that the memoirs will contain many hitherto unpublished stories of literary and social lights.' "

" You'd better look out, then," said Savory, " for the law of libel."

" Just what Peeping Tom says," delighted Horrie answered. " Where is it? Here——"

" ' Things we'd like to know. How much the lady publisher and the indiscreet author have put aside for damages? ' "

She laughed again proudly. " Koko gets everywhere."

" Have you read the stuff yet? " Savory interrupted.

" No," Horrie answered. " I'm saving it up. I cleared a lot of rubbishy manuscripts out of the way last night, so as to have to-day free."

" I wonder if I'm in it," said Savory unexpectedly.

" You? " Horrie stared. " Why should you be in it? You were still at your preparatory when he left England."

" Came across him in Cairo in '15," Savory answered.

" What? " Horrie clamoured. " How? Marmion didn't tell me."

" He wouldn't," said Savory.

"Why not?" Horrie asked.

"It isn't a very pretty story," Savory answered. "Did you ever hear of Madame Dupuits?"

"No," said Horrie. "Who is she?"

"Was she," Savory corrected. "She's dead. Ask Poole about it some time!"

"What's this, James?" Horrie asked soberly; and when he hesitated: "Marmion's my old friend."

"It's nothing," said Savory, "if you look at it in the right way."

"Which doesn't happen to be your way," said shrewd Horrie, watching.

"No," Savory admitted, "and I told him so. Well, here's the story. There was a Frenchwoman, Madame Dupuits, in Cairo that year—a wrong 'un; but she knew all the big pots among the Gippo nobility—some idea of being in with the right people if we ever had to let go. She didn't like the English. Well, the Gippos told her things. She didn't use her knowledge, but she liked knowing. She had plenty of money: her pals saw to that—no getting at her that way. Poole happened to be in Cairo on some other job, and I turned him on to this. I was Intelligence at the time. He was with her everywhere, lived in her pocket for a month or two, and we began to get invaluable reports. Then his real job came to an end and he had to clear out—ordered to Persia. But he talked before he went."

"About her?" Horrie asked, surprised.

"Oh, nothing much. Just said something over a drink at the club to the effect that when he was gone there'd be nobody English left with enough experience to draw truth from the well. *Puits* is the French for 'well,' you know. A joke —but somebody was listening. She was found next day up by the citadel mosque with a string round her throat. That's all. It's a neat story."

"But, James," Horrie asked bewildered— "you don't mean Marmion——"

"Poole? No, he was out of the country. It was the Gippos, of course, though, as a matter of fact, we got the credit."

"Then Marmion couldn't have known about it?"

"No."

Horrie sat back, hands flat on the table before her, in silence considering the story, and shaking her head indulgently.

"Pure Marmion," said she. "He never could resist a pun. Or telling people. It's torture for him to keep quiet about his own cleverness. Events mean nothing to Marmion: it's what he can make of them. Besides, in this case, I don't see that he's to blame. You're to blame if anyone is: you made him do it."

"Yes," Savory agreed. "From my point of view it was a good piece of work. We were grateful to him."

"And if he had known," mused Horrie, "he'd have put it out of his mind. Marmion has ducks' feathers for unpleasantness. It just rolls off him. I never knew a man who could forget so

gracefully. It's the Artistic Temperament. You've got to forgive the Artistic Temperament —always and anything! No, there won't be anything about you in the memoirs. He'll have forgotten."

"I haven't," said Savory. "I found her."

"At any rate," Horrie overwhelmed him, "I don't see anything in that—war necessity—to stop my making a director of him in peace-time."

"There are other things," said Savory uneasily. "Little things, but they pile up. Even here in London"—he pointed to the Press cuttings—"you see how he's looked on. People are afraid of him."

At that Horrie laughed, an infectious shout that was one of her most endearing characteristics. "Go away, James!" said she. "Go and take a liver pill! The most brilliant writer in England and you object to his attraction for women! You'll be saying I'm a victim next. Go away and think it over! This is business, James!"

Miss Gigg tapped and appeared.

"A gentleman," said Miss Gigg, holding out a card.

"Appointment?" Horrie inquired, not taking it.

"No," replied Miss Gigg, "and he won't say what he's come about."

"What's his name?" said Horrie. She took the card and frowned over it.

"Lieutenant-General Sir Torquil Brewster!" she read—and handed the card to Savory. "D'you know him, James?"

"Had our Division in '17," said Savory. "His wife's the beauty, Lady Richenda. Noisy, but no harm in him."

"He seems quite upset," Miss Gigg volunteered. "He keeps on walking about, and he talks ever so loud."

"Ask him to say what his business is," said Horrie Pedler, "and make an appointment."

"Very well, Miss Pedler," said Miss Gigg, retreating with evident reluctance. "But I don't know what he'll say."

She gave a slight scream. The handle of the door turned as she touched it, and a tall figure advanced past her into the room.

"What's this?" said Horrie Pedler, rising. "Who are you, please.?"

"I followed this young lady," said the intruder, courteously inclining toward Miss Gigg, "to request an interview with you, madam."

"I'm a very busy woman," said Horrie. "I have to keep to my time-table. If you will make an appointment——"

"I see your point, madam," said the intruder, "but it's a serious matter. Fact is, my wife's in a deuce of a state—the very deuce of a state," Sir Torquil repeated, "on account of this feller Poole. You know him, I understand?"

"Mr. Poole is a friend of mine," said Horrie stiffly. "Why don't you approach him personally?"

"I gather—only from what my wife says, of course—that it wouldn't be much good," said

the general innocently. "He's—ah—got a knack—of making you feel a fool, so my wife says. My wife's a bit of a psychologist, y' know—Freud—that sort of thing. No, Miss—er—I'd rather get your view, if you don't mind."

"Very well, Miss Gigg!" said Horrie, and nodded the secretary to depart. "Don't go, James! Major Savory," said Horrie, presenting him, "is my manager."

"Soldier, eh?" said the general. "Regiment?"

"Blowhards, sir. Fourth Battalion," Savory answered.

"Ah!" Reassured, the general accepted him, interpreted Horrie's gesture, and sat.

"Fact is," said he, "you must excuse me. It's not on my own account. I don't know the feller. Never read fiction. But my wife—my wife, Lady Richenda—she's had quite an attack of nerves over it—yes, she's quite prostrated. She's gone to bed—at least, she hasn't got up."

"What's this got to do with Mr. Poole?" Horrie asked.

"I understand," said Sir Torquil, "that is, my wife tells me, she saw in some paper or other about a book of memoirs he's written——"

Horrie exchanged a glance with the impassive Savory.

"Yes?" she said slowly.

"Well"—the general went on, warming to his subject—"it seems this feller—speaking in confidence, of course—this feller used to hang

round my wife before she married me. But she never took to him—made himself a nuisance, she says, and she snubbed him. Now she imagines he'll bring this up in some way," said the general, " some way that'll make her look the fool instead of him. He's uncommon clever, she says. Twists things any way he likes."

" I assure you that Mr. Poole is incapable of anything of the kind," said Horrie warmly. " Lady Richenda is quite mistaken."

" You assure me of that ? " said the general hopefully. " You assure me that there is no reference of any sort to my wife ? "

" Sir Torquil," said Horrie grandly, " do you think that a firm of this kind is going to risk its reputation in a libel action ? "

" No," said the general. " No ! Naturally you wouldn't. Well, that's most satisfactory. I hope that'll calm my wife down. I told her no man would be such a cad ; and she said I didn't know poets. Not true, you know. Had one on my staff for a bit. But he got all right after the Armistice "—and the general rose and held out his hand to Horrie.

" Good-bye, madam ! I apologise. Fact is, I didn't quite know what to expect. My wife, you know—terrible things, nerves ! Well—Miss Pedler, isn't it ?—thank you, Miss Pedler. And if I come across any of your books——" The general, feeling that he had gone too far, withdrew the half-promise. " But I'm not a great reader. Never touch fiction. Well, good day ! "

He went.

"What do you make of that, James?" said the bewildered Horrie.

"He's the first," Savory answered cryptically, "but not the last."

"They can't be such fools——" Horrie began.

The telephone bell rang.

She answered it, while Savory sardonically listened.

"Yes? Very well! Put her through! . . . Mrs. Fenwick Sprowle," said she to him aside. Then, to the receiver—"Yes, Horrie Pedler. You, Adela? Good morning! What?"

A long silence followed, interrupted by ejaculations from Horrie.

"But I don't—certainly not! Of course not! My dear Adela—my *dear* Adela! I haven't read the thing myself yet. I don't know. I can't tell you. I haven't the least idea. No. No. No, I'm desperately busy. No, really! No. Good-bye!"

"Will I just let her have a peep at the *Reflections*!" said Horrie, outraged. "And is there anything about her in 'em? And if there is, will I please take it with a grain of salt; and we all know Marmion, don't we? James, I'm beginning to believe you're right about all this."

Savory laughed unpleasantly.

"I know I am," said he, and departed, almost overturning Miss Gigg, in whose stars it was written that she should encounter people unexpectedly in doorways all her life long.

"Mr. Fry to see you urgent," said Miss Gigg

excitedly, " and there's some wires and these letters and Mr. Algernon Lundy waiting downstairs."

" I'll see Mr. Fry. Give me the letters," said Horrie gloomily, as though she paraphrased Lady Macbeth, " and tell Mr. Lundy I can't see him."

Miss Gigg retreated. Horrie took up one of the open letters. Dazed, she read :

c/o The Hue and Cry,
Box 43007.

DEAR MADAM,—I understand from the enclosed cutting (which please return) that your Mr. Marmion Poole is shortly publishing reminiscences of his early life.

As a devoted admirer and old friend well known to him, he can hardly have omitted many references to self : and feel, dear Madam, that you will see the Reason and Justice which has never been asked in vain from your sex, I may say, since the vote was theirs (and earlier) of reimbursing me for my share in this matter.

I have had a hard struggle since those golden days : and, between you and I, have often been tempted, as Mr. Poole says in his " Farewell," " not to stand upon the order of my going, but *Go* " ; but refrained. I suggest a 10 per cent. basis, and will be happy to hear from you at above address. Please give kindest remembrances to my old pal Mr. Poole, and ask him does he still take Bombay duck with his oysters ?

I am, dear Madam, yours in the craft,
MILLIGAN FINCH, *B.A.* (*Oxon.*).

" Listen to this, Koko ! " said Horrie Pedler, looking up as he entered, and re-read it aloud.

"Great!" grinned Koko Fry, lilting to an imaginary jazz measure which he hummed:

"He's the noise!
Girls and boys
All start yelling
When he starts telling
The truth! O! Hi! O!"

"Stop it, Koko!" Horrie commanded, "and tell me what I'm to do. Look at these nonsensical things from all over the country!"

She picked up a wire at random.

The Printer, Pedlar's Pack Bookshop, London.

Absolutely forbid publication Poole Memoirs without previous consultation me shall leave night express for London unwarrantable impertinence will consult solicitor kindly meet train BOLITHO MCADDA, *Ossian Villa, Cape Wrath.*

"Is the man mad?" asked Horrie.

"Scared," said Koko, whose grin could expand no farther. "It's all too good to last, but let me dream on! I'll meet Bolitho's train. You leave it to me. I'll make him tingle all down his spine."

"And this," said Horrie, paying no attention, "from Lucinda—pages of it. Prepaid answer, too!

"Horrie darling wicked one when are you coming long promised visit any time you like suits me weekend or during week do can send car to town for you if preferred

but please come longing to hear your news and talk over old times so out of things down here two years since we met new novel nearly finished and why wasn't I asked lunch you devil darling much love have prepaid reply LUCINDA, *Poplar's Rustle, Merioneth.*"

Koko, in his turn, had not been listening. He had snatched up the batch of letters and was reading with little skips and whistles of joy.

"Here's a plum," said he. "This is the best yet. . . . The Rickshaw," he read, "Down Avenue, Hove.

"DEAR MISS PEDLER,—You don't know me, but I know you, having been for many years assistant librarian in the second-hand Tauchnitz depot, Hong-kong: and always so much admired your choice of books to publish, so refined and deep. We had a lot of yours, not only Tauchnitz.

I'm at home now, and do hope you'll forgive it if it's a liberty, but do hope you won't let that Mr. Poole publish anything unsuitable, because my second cousin knew him quite well by sight in the old days and it would be a pity whichever way you look at it.

I do hope you don't mind all this, dear Miss Pedler: I am not accustomed to writing to authors, but my cousin used to write to Mr. Poole though he did not answer, and my family would not like it if through her I got into print. I do hope you don't mind.

"Yours gratefully,

"(Mrs.) EDITH TOMBS.

"Refined and deep! Yes, that one wins."

"No, it doesn't," said Horrie crossly, losing her temper as the dreadful game proceeded,

but unable to refrain from playing the trump she held. "This is far worse."

She read :

"Seethings,
"The Dip,
"Near Camelot.

"DEAR MADAM,—I was of course exceedingly interested to hear of the new Poole portent, and should be delighted to be of any assistance. He may have forgotten, but I have not. Will you tell him so at your convenience, and if he doesn't remember at once say "Cynara!" for me? That ought to do it. I am so glad for him, say. I can call at any time.

Yours faithfully,
L. P. HASTING-POOL
(No "e"—no blood relation)."

"Stop it!" implored K. K. Fry, bowed with laughter. "Let me alone! I've got hiccups. The copy you people get! Give me that last one! I want to frame it."

They broke down together, and lifted weeping faces to the entering and astounded Miss Gigg.

"Mr. Lundy," said Miss Gigg tremulously. "He won't go. Won't hear of it. I gave him Miss Pringle's book to keep him quiet, and he threw it on the floor and he called her a nincompoop. Fancy!" said Miss Gigg, wide-eyed.

"Have him up!" Koko begged. "Have him up and let me stay! I won't burst, I take my oath. Not yet. Oh, let me stay and I'll die happy."

" Be good, then," said Horrie, wiping her eyes. " Lucky I don't make up : it would be everywhere by this time. What will Algernon think ? And I've done no work at all—not a letter—not a line. Where's it all going to end ? "

" It's not going to end," said K. K. Fry. " It's going on for ever, amen, and I'll see that it does. It's the stunt of the century—— "

" Mr. Lundy ! " said Miss Gigg, and hastily shut the door.

> Still to be neat, still to be drest,
> As you were going to a feast :
> Still to be powdered, still perfumed——

The verse might have been written in the twentieth century and entitled " Introduction to Algernon Lundy ! " Even now, after such extravagant conduct as Miss Gigg had reported, not a hair of his head was out of place.

" Horrie—— " said he, and advanced on tiptoe, both hands eagerly outstretched. " My very dear creature—— "

He broke off, observing Mr. Fry.

" If I might have," said Algernon Lundy, appealing to her, " just half a sentence with you alone ? "

" Mr. Fry is my press agent," Horrie replied.

" Oh, really," said Algernon Lundy, brightening, " really ! " His face fell. " But I don't come on my own account," said he dolefully. " I'm afraid it's all got to be totally private."

" Algernon," said Horrie desperately, " you've

come to ask me about Marmion's memoirs. You've come to ask can you have a peep at them. You've come to say that your aunt, or your sister-in-law, or your niece by marriage's cook, is afraid he's said something silly and wants it left out."

"Not quaite," said Algernon Lundy, very precisely. "Not quaite! My aunt, yes; and my sister-in-law; but not the cook. You've confused that. It's my niece by marriage's governess."

Horrie's voice trembled as she replied:

"Well, Algernon, and what do you propose that I should do about it?"

"Dear," he appealed in answer, "we all know, don't we, what Marmion is? The dearest fellow, but I imagine that the flavour of his memoirs might be slightly gamy. You do see, don't you? How simple just to disguise it! Rather more of the orange salad and a trifle less of the black duck is all I ask."

"Go home, Algernon," said Horrie sternly, "and tell these women——Are they all in bed, by the way?"

"Two are," he corroborated. "Two are. The governess, I believe, is still up and about; but looking pale, they tell me. Why?"

"Then will you kindly ask them to get up and stop making nuisances of themselves?"

"My dear," said he piteously, "I daren't. You don't realise the state they're in—the state all London's in. It's quaite appalling—rather, I imagine, like a panic in the tube."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Horrie, roused. "Nonsense, nonsense, nonsense, Algernon! No, I won't tell you anything—I won't tell anybody anything. Your female relations mustn't take themselves so seriously."

"But," said Algernon Lundy, point-device, but in the voice of one rending his garments, "they'll slay me."

"I'll send a wreath," said Horrie Pedler, "of orchids." And so evicted him.

"Koko," said she to the shaking figure at the mantelpiece, "for heaven's sake what's going to happen?"

He did not answer. Events were proving too much for Koko Fry. He was helpless in their grip and in the unrelenting grip of laughter. Horrie regarded him despairingly and took up the list of her appointments.

"Twelve o'clock," said she, "and I know I've got some author or other coming."

The door opened.

"Miss Selina Pringle," said Miss Gigg, relieved to be announcing an appointed visitor at last. And Selina Pringle came in, a transformed Selina. Her cheeks were pink, her eyes were bright, and her pretty mouth aquiver with restrained utterance. There was no sign of her usual shyness, by which, if Horrie had been given time, she would have inferred that her young client was in a state of considerable excitement. But she was not given time.

"Oh, Miss Pedler, what do you think! Oh, Miss Pedler, how good of you to see me! I

mean—knowing how up to the eyes with all this you must be—but I had to come ! " cried Selina, and, advancing upon her publisher, kissed her tenderly. Koko, observing, caught his employer's unobscured eye gleaming above Selina's large yellow fox collarette, and obeyed its agonised command. He sprang forward, chair in hand. Selina was grateful and showed it by including him in the conversation.

" Well," said Selina, " who do you suppose has sent me ? Guess ! " She waited. " I'll give you two guesses," said Selina. And then, not altogether displeased that the problem was beyond them, continued—" George ! Would you believe it ? He knows Mr. Poole and he never told me. I do think he might have told me. I mean, I've worshipped Mr. Poole for such years now. I always say he and Shakespeare taught me all I know—except George Moore, of course," said Selina. " And never to tell me ! But when I told him about the *Reflections* he went as white ! . . . My husband was there, fortunately—my first husband, I mean," said Selina, " and he got him a stiff whisky and soda. I never know when to say ' when,' you know, when I do ! And then when George had drunk it he told me——Oh, he was sweet ! He said it was me he was thinking of. But if Mr. Poole had told about when they were together in Tangier——Well, it would look as if I didn't trust him, you see. And so we wondered if you'd just ask him—Mr. Poole, I mean—if perhaps he'd leave it out ? "

Koko rose hastily and went to the window again. It was a small window with a wire blind, and it faced a blank wall, but he appeared to enjoy the view. Horrie, left to her duty, did it.

"I don't think Mr. Pringle——" she began.

Selina was hurt.

"Pringle's my first married name," she said. "George wouldn't be called Pringle for anything—not in his profession, I mean."

Horrie rose decisively.

"Quite—I quite see that. But I think you can trust me and Mr. Poole, my dear! Tell your husband not to worry. How does the new book go? I hope you're not hurrying it. I'm afraid we're only in the fifteen hundreds with *The Inverted Lamp-post*," said Horrie, with impressive steely regret. "No, nothing like as well as we expected. What are you calling the new one?"

"*Just Dust*," said Selina meekly, and began to understand the phrase, "When the wine is out."

Horrie shook her head.

"No, my dear, no. Think of something else. I don't like it at all."

"Well, I did wonder if *The Carpet-Sweeper*—" began Selina.

"No," said Horrie firmly. "No fragrance; no rhythm. You must think it over and so will I. Good-bye, my dear!"

And Selina, relinquished by Horrie, courteously propelled by Koko, sighed and disappeared.

But hardly had Horrie turned, with a gesture of exhaustion, to her desk when quick footsteps were heard returning, and there was a tap. The door opened some three inches, and the timid quarter-face of her visitor appeared in the aperture.

"*Tea-Leaves,*" said Selina, and was gone.

The telephone bell rang.

"What is it now?" said Horrie, wearily taking it up.

She listened. Her expression changed.

"What? Private secretary to—— Of course, of course! Put him through!"

Koko Fry snatched up one of Horrie's letters, folded it, and sat with his pencil poised above the improvised pad.

"Who," he speculated, "is grand enough—? Saumarez? The Archbishop of Canterbury?"

"Sh!" said Horrie. Then to the telephone —"Yes? Yes, it is. Good morning. I beg your pardon. I *beg* your pardon. The week-end after next? Of course, I shall be honoured —very much honoured."

"Who?" Koko Fry breathed, intrigued.

"Thank you," Horrie went on, regardless of him. "Yes, one or two things, but they must be put off, of course."

"Who?" Koko insisted in a whisper, rabid with curiosity.

"Thank you. Oh, wait! Wait one moment! Ought I to write formally and accept? I'm rather out of my depth. Oh, thank you! Very well. Yes, I see. Very

much honoured indeed. Good morning!"

"Who?" demanded Koko, thumping her desk with the butt of his pencil. "Will you tell me who?"

"Somebody I only met once," said Horrie Pedler, "and then I curtsied."

"What!" said Koko, incredulous. "You don't mean to say—which?" His eyes grew large. He gave an irreverent whistle and pounced again upon his pencil like a small dog seizing the largest and most succulent bone that has ever come its way. But inevitably, as to the small dog, discipline intervened.

"No, Koko!" came the tones of command. "No, no, Koko! I can't let you. No."

Sulkily, guiltily, the bone was relinquished; but his mouth still watered.

"I wouldn't say straight out," he pleaded. "Just a paragraph—just one little question in Peeping Tom."

"No," said Horrie finally. And went across to her safe.

"Koko," said she, "I've got to find out what it's all about. I've never had such a morning, never in my life. I can't deal with any more people until I've read the stuff." She took two heavy manuscripts from the safe and closed it again. "Come upstairs and have lunch with me, and leave punctually at half-past two. I must read this—this angel at Bethesda."

"What, Marmion?" chuckled Koko. "He's not the angel: he's the pool."

" Be quiet," said Horrie impatiently, " and don't make bad puns at me. If I were ten years younger I'd scream ! For goodness' sake, come along ! "

The luncheon, apologetically tossed up by Ulysse, who had not been warned of the impending guest, was light, as a luncheon should be if work is to follow—an omelette, a slice of galantine, a salad, fruit, coffee. Koko kept his eye on the clock, and, as its long hand pointed to the half-hour, leaped from his seat, swallowed the last mouthful of coffee, rapidly ate the sugar deliciously accumulated at the bottom of his cup, shook hands without a word, and fled.

Left alone, Horrie Pedler went out on her pleasant roof-garden and sat herself down in a wickerwork chair with a middle-aged spread very accommodating to elderly shapes. The heavy typescript lay on her knee, and before she turned its first page she looked up at the Adonis standing in the centre of the birds' fountain. Marmion had found it on what Horrie called one of his islands ; and Marmion had sent it to her, as he said, to remind her of him. Indeed, the head of the bronze, with its flaring nostrils, its youth, its smile, was not unlike the Marmion of those days. She sat a moment thinking of the Marmion of those days. It would be pleasant to read of those days : and here they were at last, lying in her lap.

" Dear Marmion," murmured Horrie Pedler, and, smiling in affectionate anticipation, began to read.

The afternoon turned from blue to golden, from golden to crimson. The heavy summer sun dropped behind the roofs, the late aubretias in the crazy pavements turned from violet to blood-purple, the water of the birds' fountain reflected the red of the flushed skies, and the tall Adonis flung his lengthening hyacinthine shadow forward till it touched Horrie's foot.

As if she felt the touch, she started. The manuscript, read to a finish half an hour before, slid from her lap. She stood a moment, upright, looking down at it. "I wish I knew what to do," said Horrie; she had a habit of talking out her difficulties with herself aloud. The joyful excitement had gone from her voice and air: her expression was stern, yet worried: she looked at that moment comically like a conscientious aunt receiving a bad school report. A sunset wind sprang up from nowhere and ruffled her hair, and the shadow of the Adonis crept upward from her sensibly shod foot to her still neat ankle.

"It's getting cold already," said Horrie fretfully. And then—"I suppose it's the height. Well—let's get on with it!"

She rose as she spoke and went in, took down her telephone, asked for a number, and got it.

"Hullo! Is that you, Marmion?" said Horrie Pedler, and her voice was businesslike. "Yes, it's Horrie. Look here, Marmion, I've got to see you. As soon as possible. No, I can't discuss it now—too long. Not before Tuesday? Oh, that's a pity. Well, Tuesday

then. Will you dine with me, or——? Oh, all right, I'll dine with you if you'd rather. I'd like to. Eight-thirty, then. Good-bye, Marmion ! ''

She hung up the receiver, and, being a sensible woman of sixty-five with an important position to maintain, sat down without more ado to her piles of neglected letters.

But in the kindly half-light, rosy and softening, she did not look her importance, her age, her position, or her business capacity. She looked as any woman looks from sixteen to sixty-five who, bitterly disappointed, is longing for a good cry.

CHAPTER FIVE — WHITEWASH AND JOHN SEBASTIAN !

This is the silliest stuff that ever I heard.
MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

K. K. FRY—he never signed himself otherwise—stepped off his omnibus at the World's End and stepped out for the river. He was sufficiently prosperous to take a taxi, and wise enough not to : the London taxi-driver is not at his best beyond the World's End ; and somewhere between the Embankment and that final stopping-place of all the buses which served Chelsea lay Jordan Mews. Koko walked briskly, and at street corners he talked briskly ; and so came at last to a blind alley of porticoed lodging-houses.

The doorway he sought had one black and one parti-coloured pillar (for the next house preferred itself in red and stood upon its rights), a massive door, and a smell of curry. He knocked. He rang. He knocked again.

At the end of the second knocking a door at the foot of the area steps opened and an astonishing head, wrapped in what appeared to be a snow-white turban, was protruded.

" Well ? " remarked the head, surveying Koko Fry with some severity. " You're in a hurry, aren't you ? This house ain't on fire that I know."

" Sorry to trouble you——" Koko began.

"Trouble!" exclaimed the head, with a satirical laugh. "That's nothing new. I never can have so much as a shampoo without something goes wrong. Last time it was the gas. Well, what do you want?"

"Miss Bedenham," Koko replied. "Don't bother to come up!"

And he prepared to descend the area steps. But at this the head withdrew like that of a threatened tortoise; the door slammed and the voice, upraised from behind its shelter, rebuked him.

"No, you don't! Bargin' into a lady's kitchen as if it belonged to you! You go on up and wait!"

Koko retreated, and stood meekly at the door while steps thudded inside. It was opened at last by the landlady, who, as a slight concession to appearance, had replaced the towel with a tweed cap.

"Now then," said the landlady truculently, "who was this you wanted to see? Miss Bedenham—ah! But who's to say she wants to see you?"

"How about asking her?" Koko suggested, making a step forward.

"You wait there," said the landlady, arresting him with a nod of the check cap. "Is she my basement floor back, or is she yours?"

"You win," Koko replied genially. "Go ahead and ask her. Say it's Mr. Fry—Koko Fry."

The landlady backed along the passage,

keeping an eye on him, a tribute which is only paid to those extreme points of society, royalty and the suspected burglar.

"Miss Bedenham!" she called. "Young feller to see you!"

An indistinguishable voice apparently asked his name.

"Cadbury!" the landlady shouted in reply.

"No, no," Koko corrected her. "Fry!"

"Same thing," said the landlady. "Anyhow, she says go on down!"

He went on down, more hurriedly than he intended. For his feet encountered, in the gloom of the pitch-black stairway, a reverberating obstruction. He kicked, tripped, wrenched at the invisible stair-rail, tripped again, and arrived with a clank and a slam upon the floor of frayed linoleum. He sat up dizzily; his hand dripped; he wondered—was it blood? He leaned against the wall behind him, only to fall once more, because the wall was a door, and the door was latched, and Gilda Bedenham herself had just lifted the latch. She brought with her, as she pulled it open, a certain lightening of the gloom, too faint to be called daylight. He was aware rather than observant of the fact that she was surveying him.

"I'm so sorry. Did you fall?" she asked.

Koko hated her.

"Fall?" said he. "I was sliding down the banisters. Don't often get the chance."

Gilda ignored the anguished flippancy. Instead, as one solving a problem: "It's rather

dark," she said. And then, " Why don't you get up ? "

" I'm dead," said Koko, resolved on sympathy before he rose. " I've kicked the bucket."

She stooped to him.

" Dear ! " said Gilda, in a state of concern.

He stiffened with surprise at the affectionate monosyllable, only to realise that it was no more than the Oxford for an expletive.

" Dear ! Waste ! I do hope you're not hurt. Early closing too ! Is there any left ? "

A renewed clank assured him that the pail, at any rate, had been righted.

Their voices sounded a spoken duet in the dark, hers slow and cool, his the brisk chirp of the London sparrow.

" Here, what about me ? " inquired Koko fretfully. " I'm a shambles."

Gilda felt for him with her unoccupied hand.

" Come through ! Yes, it's messed you, I'm afraid. I'm exceedingly sorry. Won't you come in? I'll wipe you down," she said; and prodded him firmly down the passage toward the light.

He found himself in a sufficiently large, low ceilinged room, lighted by a bay window which admitted light and air but afforded no sky-line. It had, indeed, been one of those grim Victorian breakfast-rooms of the Victorian world, and was still grim, but in the modern manner. The walls were cream-washed, the ceiling white, the green-stained floor covered with coconut matting. A whitewood table and chairs, angular and unvarnished, sparsely furnished the

central emptiness. A divan bed was covered with green serge, and cushions of really admirable Chinese embroidery were piled upon it. The immense black marble fireplace had a gas stove with a ring top in its centre : and a large box, painted scarlet and pokerworked, hinted by reason of the coal-dust that smeared one side, that its presence was not due merely to a love of ornament. On the mantelpiece stood the intricate model of a ship in full sail, an electric torch, and a match-box. On the wall hung two prints : one a coloured woodcut of delphiniums, a gallant note of blue ; the other a reproduction of Vincent van Gogh's sunflowers, that seemed, even in this northward-facing room, to follow and adore the sun. A grand piano, a Minton chair, and a typewriter completed the furnishing of the room, which was rescued from utter drabness by a bowl of wild flowers, fresh and delicately arranged on the central table.

" Culture—what ho ! " said Koko, deeply interested. " I knew it ! They're all alike."

" Who are ? " Gilda reappeared from the glooms of the passage with a bowl of warm water in one hand and a sponge in the other. She continued, without waiting for his answer : " Give me your coat. Take it off, won't you ? " She surveyed the wreckage, appalled, as well she might be. " There must have been quite a lot left," she mourned. " Oh, well ! " And she set to work with ineffectual dabs of the sponge, which left crumbs of red rubber wherever it passed.

" No good crying over spilt distemper," Koko approved. " But what's the big idea ? "

He indicated with a large gesture the room in general.

" You see, I've moved," said Gilda helplessly. " I couldn't stay on with Horrie after the row, so I took this bed-sitter. But it was filthy, so I whitewashed it all. Don't you think it looks well ? I'm rather proud of it. There's the passage to do still. I should have finished it to-day, but now you've spilled my distemper. Hold that, won't you ? "

He held it : and watched her attack the cream-coloured streaks with her inexpert sponge. Her hands were the sensitive yet clumsy hands of the musician, that can wrench out the heart of a sonata, but are singularly unadapted to odd jobs. The distemper paled, and as it paled it spread, until Koko's modish coat resembled the discarded upper garment of some forlorn Pierrot. Even Gilda, tilting her head to view it better, abandoned the illusion that she was being of use.

" It's ruined," she said. " I don't see how you're to get home."

For his trousers, too, like the eels of Lord Rendal, were speckled and blotched.

" Don't you worry about me," said Koko.

He had been itching to set to work on his own coat himself. He snatched at the opportunity of the abandoned sponge, while she stood by unhappily considering the ruin.

" Would you like some tea ? " she said at last hopefully ; and then, from the depths of a

cupboard, "What have you come about, Mr. Fry?"

"Well, it was Horrie——" he began.

She stood upright, sugar-bowl in one hand, a jug in the other.

"Miss Pedler has nothing to say to my affairs."

"She thinks she has," returned Koko, unperturbed. "And, mind you, I don't say she's wrong."

"You—it's not your business either."

"Did I say it was?" Koko inquired. "I'm talking about what Horrie Pedler thinks."

"Then I don't want to hear it."

"Haven't got a job yet, I suppose?" Koko asked abruptly.

"Why doesn't Horrie Pedler ask her own questions," the girl riposted, "if she wants to know?"

"Did I say she wanted to know?" said Koko. "This is K. K. Fry speaking. Have you or have you not got another job?"

"I won't tell you."

"That means you haven't," said Koko, watching her. "I suppose you've tried?"

She answered, with an irritation which showed her weariness, "Of course I've tried."

"Yes, but what do you want to do?" he said. Then, reflectively: "I don't think you'll do anything you don't want to do—not well."

"They all say that," she muttered.

"Well, what's your line?" he insisted.

She shrugged. "I used to think I could play."

"Can't you?" said he, glancing at the piano.

"Not well enough."

"Compose?" said he, more hopefully.

"Not without unlimited free time." Suddenly she burst out bitterly: "Oh, the office is right! I'm unsuitable. I don't suit anything or anyone. And yet"—she flushed—"I've something to say in my own way, if I could only learn how to say it."

"Any cash put by?" inquired practical Koko.

"I can manage, thank you very much!" said she.

"That means you haven't," said Koko.

She did not deny it. He looked round the bare room, at the half-open door of the little cupboard which presented such a pathetic resemblance to that of Mother Hubbard.

"Hm!" he decided. "Well, I'll think over your case."

She raised her eyebrows. "I don't think I asked you to."

"No, but Horrie did. Everybody does what Horrie says. You'll have to. We all have to. Why don't you like Horrie? She's a good sort, she really is."

Gilda shifted uneasily.

"But I do like her—really I do. But I'm—I'm too much obliged to her. She's been oppressively kind to me, and wants to go on. She'd be perfectly capable of making me an allowance just because she knew my mother. What are you to do with a woman like that? Oh, she makes me furious!"

"You've upset her too, let me tell you. She was nearly in tears. She wasn't furious."

"She's an odd woman," said Gilda, puzzled. "She ought to have been furious."

"Why?" Koko asked.

"Didn't she tell you about it?" Gilda asked in turn, surprised.

"Not Horrie."

"Well, I was ungrateful," said Gilda bluntly, and looked at him in a way that said he might think what he liked.

"She wouldn't mind that," Koko assured her.

She flared to sudden rage at this comfortable statement.

"That's what so maddening about Horrie Pedler. She's kind because she likes to be. Nothing one does will turn her from her kindness. I resent that."

"I don't," said Koko. "I like her, I tell you. She's comfortable. She understands a joke. You know where you are with Horrie. You ought to get on with her, you know, Miss Bedenham. But you hypersensitive geniuses——"

"Don't be silly!" said Gilda coldly.

"Well, what else do you call yourself?" said Koko, surveying her and his coat. "Look at you! It sticks out all over you."

"What does?" said Gilda, elaborately cold.

"Genius," Koko repeated with calm.

"I told you not to be silly," Gilda pointed out to him.

"I'm not. It does stick out. You remind me of someone too, only I can't think who it is."

She flushed surprisingly. He took it as the response to his criticism, and continued :

" They all begin that way, geniuses. At least, the women do. You know—dreamy, unpunctual, Johnny-head-in-air, Oxford manner, grand but dowdy ! They all have rooms like this. And then the piano—it must have cost the earth—in a basement ! What have you got—two hundred a year? I doubt it ! You're doing it on instalments and porridge, I suppose. Won't a cottage upright do for you? No ! I tell you that's the proper genius mixture. Play me something ! "

She stared at him open-mouthed. Never, said her candid face, had Gilda Bedenham been thus addressed upon the subject of her private life and finances. Her mouth closed again, unable to compete.

" Play me something," he repeated, with an air of uncontrollable passion for sweet sounds.

She shook her head. But she was displeased to discover that she was not displeased. The boiling kettle, at this point, attracted her attention from her own singular state of mind. She made tea for him—execrable tea—and he drank it happily while she held his coat far too near the gas. Indeed, it steamed itself dry too soon ; for Koko, he did not quite know why, was enjoying himself as he had not enjoyed himself for many a long day. She was as grim as her room, and her room was grim enough, God knew ! Nevertheless, he became aware that he was enjoying himself.

" Play now," he coaxed.

She smiled and shook her head.

"I'm keen on music," offered Koko ingratiatingly.

Still she shook her head; but her eyes rested on him doubtfully.

"Are you? What sort?"

"Oh—oh, concerts, you know," said Koko, resolved not to incriminate himself. Then, on a brain wave—"Bach!"

He paused, eyed her. The effect, he thought, was good. He proceeded, cheered, and much more reckless, "Yes. Bach—Brahms—Beethoven"—and saw that on that word she winced.

"Don't like Beethoven, eh?" said Koko, halting. "Well, perhaps he is a bit of a turnip. But Bach, eh? Bach now!" Warming, he felt that he could have achieved good publicity for Bach. Gilda, at the mere mention of him, had been galvanised into benevolent activity.

"If you're keen on Bach," she said, moving to her letter-rack, "I had some tickets sent to me—where are they?—Queen's Hall. There's a Bach concert to-night—at least, there's Bach at first. I'm afraid most of it's modern."

"Modern?" Koko lit up with joy. "Modern, eh? Give me the moderns all the time," said Koko.

She was looking at him now with considerable approval.

"It's to-night," she said. "It starts at eight. You can come, if you like."

"With you?" said Koko.

"Yes, I'm going," said Gilda.

" Right ho ! " said Koko joyfully. " What about eats ? "

" But it begins at eight," said she, " and we'll almost be late starting even now. Of course "— she looked at him—" there'd be time for food if we missed the Bach. But you love Bach."

Mischief this, Koko thought, or just highbrowism ? Did the girl really suppose that he liked some dead and gone Boche better than a good cut off the joint ?

" Don't you ? " she insisted.

" What ? " asked Koko thoughtlessly. " Oh, yes, Bach ! I'd rather have Bach than a bite any day. Come on ! "

" Come on ! " she echoed. " Just wait till I get my hat."

She donned it without looking in the glass. He put on his damp caricature of a coat. Together, unfed, they went forth into the damp evening to listen to Bach.

They walked rapidly and tacitly up Jordan Street, swung on and off a bus or two, and descended at last at a forbidding Georgian portal. Inside were oddities of all sexes striving past each other, and hurrying along grey-painted corridors vaguely suggestive of jail. Doors opened out of the corridors, all closed, all austerely labelled with immense capital letters. Through one of these Gilda passed with the ease of an old offender, and they came into the auditorium. All the lights were dimmed with peculiarly depressing shades, all the talk was conducted in a hushed whisper. Through the

conversations ran a subdued wailing and groaning, with occasional harsh, strident squeals and a general suggestion of an Eastern funeral, which proceeded from the instrumentalists.

"This is great," said K. K. Fry loyally and in subdued tones.

"Yes, I like being early," Gilda replied. "One gets into the mood."

"Programme?" suggested K. K. Fry.

"No, thanks," said Gilda coldly; and he became conscious of a solecism. "But you have one if you'd like it," she added kindly.

Hurriedly he declined, while noticing with envy not untinged by relief that the lady in front had bought one and was avidly devouring what appeared to be a thrilling serial. Over her shoulder he read:

"—here their passage of dulcet dialogue is interrupted by the thunderous entry of the indignant bassoons, with a repetition of the phrase signifying doom."

"They'll take the Bach first," said Gilda, "and then the Stravinsky."

"Right!" K. K. Fry concurred, leaning slightly forward. The lady with the programme had flicked over her page excitedly, and he could see the words:

"—and so the unexpected querulous triplets are forgotten in this ecstasy of utter forgiving."

"Triplets," thought K. K. Fry, interested. "Stout feller!"

The last words were breathed aloud, and coincided with an anæmic burst of clapping.

" I suppose he is, rather," said Gilda. " But, after all, one only looks at the hands."

K. K. Fry now perceived a burly figure in the brass-edged rostrum, bowing with an air of being pleased to meet them all, who subsequently turned upon the instrumentalists and, with a couple of sharp taps of his baton, recalled them from their Eastern melancholy to the choral composition of John Sebastian Bach. They paused, sighed, and began.

The first thing that struck K. K. Fry was the difficulty that all the players seemed to have with their bows. It appeared to be completely impossible for them to get these into any position which would be at all comfortable. They began with a few slow steady passes, and appeared to be settling down nicely; then some invisible insect bit half a dozen players, and they shook their bows vigorously, not daring to stop, since the burly gentleman had his eye on them, but obviously unhappy. The unseen plague then passed to the next half-dozen, who also began to shake their bows and sway. But the burly gentleman, instead of looking away and letting them have a minute off, singled them out to gesture at in a manner that combined truculence with contempt.

The efforts of the unhappy orchestra now attracted the languid interest of a semicircle of gentlemen in dinner-jackets who stood behind it. These rose, and, upon a burst of sound, conveyed their sympathy. On which a rank of stout ladies on the conductor's right, who all

went to the same suburban dressmaker, rose and clamoured too, rating the burly man in no uncertain tones for his brutality. But they had reckoned without the rank of ladies on his left, who seemed to share their dressmaker but not their sentiments. These ladies stood up for the conductor in more senses than one, and shrilled insults at their rivals, of which the only audible word was "Jerusalem." The gentlemen, horrified at the storm their innocent intervention had raised, now endeavoured to soothe all parties by ejaculating "Peace" at irregular intervals. But the ladies were not out for peace. With one accord they turned upon the intervening gentlemen and sang them to a standstill: then, satisfied, resumed their mutual insults without fear of distraction.

Timidly the orchestra, distressed at the loss of its champions, remonstrated, but without effect, save that the ladies took larger breaths, and higher notes, and lost the tune completely; until, fear of apoplexy coming simultaneously upon them all, they stopped abruptly on a final shout, and sat down to recover their wind. The long-lost tune now trickled out of the din comparatively undamaged, and could be heard oozing from an inconspicuous instrument played by a gentleman with a walrus moustache. This unfortunate, however, was not long allowed indulgence. The burly bully, amazed at his audacity, called on the full strength of the orchestra to blow the man down. They did so; and the whirlpool of noise went round and round; and

some brass instruments which had lain ambushed suddenly darted out to twice their length and blared; and the drummer turned on all his taps; and the burly man dashed at them, lashed at them, slashed at them and mashed at them, and finally brought them into a smooth water, below which the tune sounded full fathom five.

K. K. Fry perceived, by the demeanour of the audience, that his first experience of Bach was over.

"That's what I call conducting," said Gilda at long length, moving from her trance-like attitude. "No wonder they've offered him fabulous sums to go to Philadelphia."

K. K. Fry put back the comment which rose to his tongue that Philadelphia was not far enough, and replied with a sentence memorised from the programme of the lady in front of him.

"I think," said he carefully, "that that thunderous entry of the indignant bassoons was grand."

"Wasn't it?" Gilda agreed, glowing.

"And that bit where the triplets are forgotten," pursued K. K. Fry, success going to his head.

"Where was that?" Gilda asked with interest.

K. K. Fry, seeking wildly for an answer, observed that the burly man was once more standing at the ready.

"Sh!" said he, in tones of reproach. "Stravinsky!" Stravinsky it was. And Gilda, with a glance at him of admiration tempered with surprise, settled down to enjoy it.

K. K. Fry's impressions of a remarkable tone poem might be summed up in Queen's Hall-Queensberry terms as follows :

1. No tunes allowed under the rules.

2. The penalty for disregarding Rule 1 is one free blow on a brass instrument, or several, according to the gravity of the offence.

3. There is no limit to the number of players. Anyone may join in. Some of the light-weight instruments are surprisingly game, particularly a small black tube about ten inches long, which has the six-foot fiddle beaten to a frazzle when it comes to noise.

4. The referee must caution any instrument that is not trying.

5. There is no penalty for foul playing. If there were the row could not go on.

Engrossed in formulating these rules, stunned by the noise, mazed by free counterpoint, K. K. Fry came to himself amid a storm of clapping, and met Gilda's smile.

" Ah, you like modern stuff best, don't you ? " she asked. " So do I, really. But, of course, Stravinsky's rather an antique."

" Worm-eaten," K. K. Fry assented.

For the second time the girl looked at him with approval, and he braced himself for further tests of endurance. But release, blessed, unhoped for, was at hand.

" It's the interval," said Gilda. " Shall we go? "

He stared at her, unable to credit his ears, which had already betrayed him several times in the course of the evening.

" I don't believe," Gilda went on, " that one can listen intelligently for more than an hour and a half."

" What ? " asked K. K. Fry, incredulous of his good fortune.

" Not really *listen*," said Gilda apologetically, " if you know what I mean."

" You're right," K. K. Fry rejoined heartily.

" Then shall we ? " she suggested.

For sole answer he seized his hat.

On his way home, K. K. Fry reflected with horror on the life the girl must have led. Food did not seem to enter it, for one thing. (She had declined with a wondering glance his suggestion that they should drop in somewhere and have a Welsh rabbit.) Clothes did not enter into it, nor hairdressers, nor saxophones. She lived in the vivid London world the existence of a particularly plain and dreary female convict. Concerts and cocoa were her idea of fun. From his heart he pitied her, and resolved all the way home in the underground to do something about it: to substitute sex appeal and syncopation, *foie gras* and fox-trots, for those grim alleviations of her unnatural existence. She had agreed to dine with him a week hence; then he would show her, would K. K. Fry! It should be the Bougainvillea and that new show, *Right Behind*, afterwards. Meanwhile she had said that grey, not blue, was his colour. Considering himself in the seven-inch mirror in his room when he reached home, he was inclined to think that the girl was right.

CHAPTER SIX — AT THE BOUGAINVILLEA

I will acquaintance strangle and look strange . . .
SONNETS.

THE ante-room of the Bougainvillea Restaurant was too small to afford chairs or even standing-room for those whose guests delayed. It held, with difficulty, a wicket through which hats and coats were passed, a small bebuttoned boy, and an immense umbrella which it was the duty of the boy to unfurl above the heads of ladies stepping from their cars on rainy nights. Any attempt to linger in this diminutive chamber was foiled by sheer lack of space, and by the furlings and unfurlings of the indomitable boy, so that it was no unusual sight for guests passing in to see the face of their host peering above the blind of the inner glass door as though on show in a shop window. Givers of feasts and their attendants—those who waited for ladies and those who waited on ladies—alike anticipated the arrival of society's more capricious moiety in the restaurant itself.

So, at seven-thirty of a June evening, did Mr. K. K. Fry anticipate ; so did he peer ; so did his face register the emotions of hope, eagerness, and gloom as the boy rushed forth unfurling, and re-entered with women who were known, who were lovely, but who were not Gilda. Pasquale, the *maître d'hôtel*, noted this delay as

he noted everything, with a quick turn of his bright, birdlike eye, and rather wondered if he should commandeer the table of Mr. K. K. Fry, and suggest one in the upper room. For the Bougainvillea had a system whereby only the salt of the earth were permitted as seasoning at its ground-floor tables, while to the upper room it relegated plain citizens who merely wished for a meal and could pay. Payment was nothing ; it was lustre, not lucre, that Vittorio the proprietor craved. The Bougainvillea was aware of Mr. Fry as an emissary of the Press ; but this, to one out of whose hand fed film stars and tennis champions, was no great recommendation. Vittorio did not require publicity : publicity would have ruined his business. The mighty came there for food, secure in the knowledge that they would see at the Bougainvillea only each other. Publicity would result in nonentities coming to gape at the mighty, who, finding themselves gaped at, would then go elsewhere ; leaving Vittorio with a restaurant that was a commercial proposition but no longer a shrine.

For these reasons Pasquale, his worthy lieutenant, debated swiftly in his mind while he carved a *poulet bonne femme* dexterously above its casserole : the result of which debate appeared in his next move. He approached K. K. Fry, and said, with such mournful demeanour as would have graced a wedding :

" Saire, I regret, a mistake has been made."

" What's that ? " said Koko, turning from

a fair-haired disappointment in blue, to face him.

"Your table, saire"—Pasquale's hands implored Koko not to make it more difficult for him—"your table is reserve—full—I make a mistake."

"Not you," replied Koko unimpressed. "But you're making one now."

Pasquale's suavity suffered no change.

"Upstair?" he suggested: and his voice, the motion of his hand, seemed to lend the word an air of richness and privacy. "Very sorry—no table is here—but upstair——"

Koko, however, was aware of the system which divided the Bougainvillea into Paradise and exterior darkness. He had proposed to make Gilda aware of it too, with the sub-implication that he, having a table among the elect, therefore was of them. He could not tamely give up this lordliness.

"No, thanks," he said shortly. "I'm staying down here. I booked my table yesterday."

Pasquale's face showed resignation and pity. He shrugged.

"I regret," said Pasquale again, and left his phrase unfinished. It might have been thought that he referred to his own mistake. Actually, however, what he regretted was K. K. Fry's inability to take a hint. He wondered what the next move should be, and looked about for the proprietor, whose word in such disputes must be final. But Vittorio was bending over two young actresses, gently guiding them among

the mazes of his menu, and paternally anxious for their digestions. Pasquale knew that he must fight on alone.

"I will make inquire——" said he. "The corner table you say, sair? Then I am afraid —he is reserve, that table."

"He is," Koko answered. "By me, yesterday. Have sense, Pasquale!"

And he stood on tiptoe to scan the entrance once more. His manner was sufficiently assured; but his heart was distracted. How if Gilda came before he had settled with this ass? Ardently as he wished for her coming, he now prayed for her delaying. He could not continue to argue if she came. He could not take her upstairs, thus knuckling under to Pasquale; he could not march out with her to some other restaurant where nobody counted, and where anybody was welcome who could pay. He wanted to show her; he wanted to shine. He was effective; but Pasquale, to whom the minds of the frequenters of restaurants were as large-type headlines, knew that he awaited a lady, and was nervous.

"It is a pity," said he, and looked truly compassionate. His voice melted to the unctuousness of a *béarnaise* sauce. "We all make mistakes, saire. We cannot always be right. Even the newspapers," said Pasquale, bowing, "they cannot always be right. I have a very nice table"—he paused—"upstair?"

Koko, at bay, recognised the finality in the voice, and considered for one intolerable moment

the possibility of defeat. Then, as his eye ranged the room, it saw salvation. Salvation was critically tasting a Marsala, while the wine waiter hung upon his lips. Salvation sat alone at a window table only accorded to the indubitably great. Salvation was, in fact, the rôle adopted, quite unconsciously and for the first time, by Marmion Poole. Koko saw him over Pasquale's shoulder, and crossed the room toward him, abandoning Pasquale, who turned too, and viewed the meeting with astonishment and the sinking heart of one who, with infinite pains, has accomplished a *faux pas*. For Marmion was affable : the Marsala was not bad, and he had reason to cherish his publicity agent.

" Fry—how are you ? " said Marmion, and gestured toward the seat beside him. " I didn't know you had time for frivolity."

" Hallo, sir ! " Koko returned. " Yes, I'm frivolling all right ; trying to ; but this isn't my lucky night."

" 'Tis not in mortals to command success," Marmion murmured. " Tell me your adventures."

" Lady late and Pasquale gone all haughty," returned Koko shortly. " The head'll come off my stud next. I could scream like a woman."

" Pasquale haughty ? " said Marmion.

" As any duke," Koko Fry replied. " Won't give me my table."

" We'll see," said Marmion, and made a

slight withdrawal of the head, as though he beckoned with his chin.

Pasquale, watching, and attentive to the least motion of this personage, unhappily approached. Behind the dissembling smile his mind surged with apologies, with excuses, with subterfuges, which would defend him from the naked confession that he had affronted the friend of a grandee. From close at hand, his lecture on gastronomic decorum at an end, Vittorio watched the scene, ready, though unwilling, to interfere. So might Napoleon have watched a young and favoured marshal, manœuvring his army out of an awkward position.

"Saire?" said Pasquale, deferentially inquiring.

"Why don't you give my friend his table?" Marmion asked calmly. "Don't you think you'd be wiser to be civil to your clients?"

"Saire——" The unlucky Pasquale hesitated, bowed, cast a despairing eye toward his chief. A moisture came upon his forehead. Marmion waited. Vittorio stepped nearer.

"Well?" said Marmion. "Evidently you don't think so. Bad policy, Pasquale. If Mr. Fry takes my advice, he'll insist upon his table now, and never come near the place again."

He paused. A light had appeared in the glazing eyes of Pasquale. For the second time that night Marmion Poole represented salvation.

"Mr. Fry?" said Pasquale, in accents of the most sincere amazement. "Mr. Fry!

Macché!" he lifted his hands. "But that table he is reserve for Mr. Fry. Is this your name, saire? Ah!" He smote his head. "They tell me Tomkins. Tomkins!" He laughed mockingly. "Of course your table he is all right! It is the name is wrong. Yes! we all make mistakes, saire! Even the newspapers"—and this time he bowed low—"make mistakes!"

Vittorio, smiling, moved away. His young marshal was well out of the mess; and there had entered a stout singer whose appetite, he knew, would require guidance and restraint. Koko grinned at Marmion.

"I've said it often enough in print," said Koko, "but now I know it. You're a great man."

"I have moments," Marmion admitted with grace.

"You're——" Koko broke off, stared at the door, forgot Marmion Poole's immensity, and crossed the room in three strides.

"Gilda!" said Koko Fry. "I mean, Miss Bedenham!"

Gilda Bedenham stood in the doorway of the Bougainvillea Restaurant, looking Somebody. How she achieved this effect, K. K. Fry did not know. He was something of a connoisseur in clothes, having in his time, under the pseudonym of "Cressida," written articles on the subject, articles in which he insisted on cut, on harmonious line, on the importance of detail. By such things, he had pronounced, are the Somebodies known. He had believed this at

the time ; he believed it still ; yet Gilda, by simply standing at the doorway with her head at a certain angle, made nonsense of his pronouncements and his beliefs.

Her hair was not right : obviously she had done her best with it ; presumably she had looked in the glass as she brushed it ; the fact remained, it was hair with a will of its own, which she had not been able to subdue. Her black dress was by no means cheap ; but it was ill-cut : it divided her tall figure ungraciously, and edged the wide sweep of her shoulders with regrettable lack of line. As for her shoes, that detail on which " Cressida " had so often and so rightly insisted, they were awful. How then, Koko asked himself, did she manage to look, without any question at all, a Somebody ?

Perhaps it was the shawl ! Koko, taking it from her shoulders as she sat at his corner table, concluded that it must be the shawl. The thing came from her shoulders as lightly and softly as if it had been woven of flowers : as indeed it appeared to be, for the surface of the silk was covered with a pattern of flowers—hardly that, hardly a pattern, since the flowers were not grouped or repeated ; they grew upon the silk as upon some Elysian field where good flowers might go after death, in colours natural and colours fantastic, in shapes of the garden and shapes of the mind : they flaunted, twisted, wandered and hid, and sprang up again upon a ground green as Irish grass.

Only at the very centre of the great square was this flower motive momentarily forsaken. There, a device was worked in gold, whose threads were bright still, though the fingers that worked it had been dead a century. It seemed like a ring; but Koko, looking more closely, saw that it was a gilded snake coiled at the heart of the flowers. A funny notion, he thought. Just then she turned toward him, and embroidered notions lost their importance. Still, he had to say something——

"You look great," said Koko. "My word, some shawl!"

"Oh, that——" Gilda said negligently, letting him take it. She had huddled on the astonishing thing anyhow, like a coster woman, and now she dropped it like a duchess. She sat down while Koko draped the shawl carefully over the back of a chair. With an absent hand she rendered more confounded the confusion of her lovely, hopeless hair, tweaked the shoulder-straps of her dress into unbecoming prominence, restored to her practical black leather bag a large white linen handkerchief, leaned back, and continued with no apparent effort, and in defiance of every authoritative writer on feminine charm, to look Somebody.

Pasquale, allowing bygones to be bygones, himself attended to take their order. He provided them with a menu apiece, to this extent admitting their freedom of choice; but since he stood over them and with suave suggestions irrevocably directed their attention

to the more expensive dishes, it soon became evident that the meal was predestined. It has been said that Koko knew the Bougainvillea pretty well; yet the chief of his knowledge had been acquired as a guest. He remembered the surroundings, the excellence of the food, and the names of the waiters. What he had forgotten, or what the menu now recalled to him with something of a shock, were the prices. He had saved up for this dinner. It was to be a dinner for Gilda to remember when she was an old lady sipping milk by the fire; and he had come out with enough—but not if Pasquale's suggestions were followed, suggestions which, in sheer hospitality, he felt bound to support.

"Caviar?" Pasquale was saying. "We have very nice—or a plover egg?"

Koko cast a fleeting glance at the incredible price of both delicacies, and loyally seconded the *maître d'hôtel*.

"What about it?" said he to Gilda. "We might make a start with caviar."

Gilda smiled and put her menu aside.

"Anything," she said.

"Fish," purred Pasquale, "with a white wine sauce, very nice. Then you have a bird. I do you him with truffles—*spécialité* of the house."

"Sounds all right," Koko agreed; but his smile concealed swift feats of mental arithmetic. True, he had enough; but it appeared that at the Bougainvillea enough was not nearly as good as a feast. Pasquale, making notes, was about

to round off the dinner to his own satisfaction. He waited for inspiration to come : then——

" Peach——" said Pasquale, and in the one word and his uplifted eyes the peach took shape upon a sunny wall, ripened, was plucked in some fortunate hour, and immortalised at K. K. Fry's command in a lambent halo of rum.

K. K. Fry nodded.

" Gaufrette——" said Pasquale. A mere gesture, these, tiny cakes, delicate concession to the presence of a lady.

K. K. Fry nodded.

" Coffee," said Pasquale.

K. K. Fry, now rendered completely giddy by the contemplation of the soaring total, nodded once more. Pasquale bowed and scanned his notes.

" Two caviar—two nice fish—two nice bird—two peach—coffee." He bowed. " It is a dinner, that ! "

" But we don't want a dinner," said Gilda surprisingly. " We just want something to eat."

She picked up her discarded menu and studied it dispassionately.

" How expensive everything is ! " said Gilda, her eyes ranging among the exotic foods. " I never see why one should pay a pound a mouthful for food : it's over so soon."

So much for K. K. Fry's hope that she would remember this dinner when she was old.

" What is there that's cheap ? " she inquired confidentially of Pasquale.

So much for that functionary's determination that she should dine. But amid the wreckage of the aspirations of one, and the computations of the other, both recognised that a girl who could ask in the Bougainvillea, with that voice, from the deeps of that unworthy dress, for something cheap, was beyond dispute—Somebody.

Pasquale recognised it. Indeed, not only recognised it, but submitted with the unfeigned meekness of the race that not only likes dukes, but sees to it that its dukes rule. Gracefully relinquishing the prospect of a vast bill, he proposed such simplicities of diet as a sole followed by a grill. Gilda nodded, adding as an afterthought to K. K. Fry, the giver of the feast :

" That'll do, won't it ? "

K. K. Fry, with the emphasis of relief, said that it would. And his tongue, loosened by that relief as by wine, began to chatter, directing her attention here and there among the habitués.

" See that girl over there with the Canariensis hair ? " he asked. " That's Lady Asterisk."

" Oh ! " said Gilda, dutifully looking at a young woman eating without elegance some mass of green. " Who's she ? "

" What, don't know Alice Asterisk ? " Koko inquired, aghast at this indifference to notoriety. " Why she's the one that's always in and out of jail for shoplifting. She's a vegetarian too."

" What fun ! " said Gilda.

" And that's Madge Byng," Koko went on—

" that woman with the nose. They say she's broken it twice."

" Really," said Gilda. " What for ? "

" Fun ! " replied Koko shortly. " Falling out of planes in the Sahara. And there's Angela Biddle—Biddle sisters, you know——"

" There's a man," said Gilda, interrupting, " sitting at that corner table—don't turn, you can see him in the mirror—he keeps on staring. Who is he ? "

" That," said Koko Fry, swelling importantly, " is a great man. I tell you——"

But this was, as he had said to Marmion Poole, not his lucky night. Food arrived : those cheap, reasonable, and undistinguished dishes whose ordering had impressed Pasquale more than all the careless caviar of millions : and in the bustle which included the attentions of a waiter in a white apron, a sub-waiter in a black apron, and Mr. Vittorio himself in full evening dress with pearl studs, the identity of the man who stared was not revealed.

They were hungry, and ate their ordinary dish or two with zest. Their conversation was not memorable. It was such talk as may be heard between any two young people who are interested in each other, friendly, and yet, by the long habit of reticence, shy. Koko was reticent because the Oxford manner still awed him somewhat, and because he had never known any woman save Horrie who cared for conversation. There had been no conversations in his mother's house. His mother, placid, efficient, met

attempts at dialectic with the all-comprehending phrase, "I'm not arguing with you, dearie—I'm telling you." There had been "jaw," which was ordinary intercourse, and "lip" or "cheek," which was departure from civility. None of these anatomical terms seemed apt to describe the sort of talk he wanted to have with Gilda. He had words in plenty within call, words were his trade and his trouble; for he had been taught in half a dozen newspaper offices that words are given man to conceal his thoughts, or at best to fit them out with a suit of ready-mades. He said much, therefore, yet told her little.

Gilda, too, had the habit of reticence, but for a different reason. Pride, in the first place, had demanded it; next, her education had laid stress upon the avoidance of banality; and it is difficult to steer clear of this if the talk concerns everyday things.

They ate and watched each other; and found in each other things to like; and things that could do with alteration. Koko reflected that a season ticket at the hairdresser's was what Gilda required, together with some clothes that were clothes, and a proper regard for publicity as an art. Gilda decided that when she knew Koko better she would suggest that the choice of a signet ring depends on the sex, not the taste, of the wearer, and that vowels can be manicured as easily and even more cheaply than finger-nails. Both, however, found in themselves the astonishing opinion flowering that these little things don't really matter!

Their meal had reached the stage of coffee, and their talk had mellowed to the comparison of personal experience in the matter of landladies, when Koko saw Gilda frown slightly, and lift one shoulder uneasily.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered. "Go on with what you were saying."

But Koko had noticed the direction of her glance, and turned to encounter the gaze of Marmion Poole. Marmion, unembarrassed, met Koko's eye and made once more a small summoning motion with his chin, and a crooked finger which Gilda observed.

"D'you know that man?" she asked.

"Know him?" said Koko. "I should say I do! Only professionally, of course," he added in honesty.

"You'd better go to him, hadn't you?" she added coolly.

For, though she would not admit it, the staring stranger intrigued her. The stare was not uncivil. Indeed, it seemed to go past her. Yet she knew that the brilliant eyes had seen and would remember her.

"Sure you don't mind?" said Koko, half out of his chair.

"Run along!" she answered.

She watched him walk to the staring man's table, saw them talk, saw both pairs of eyes turn her way, and then the quick movement of Koko as he stood aside to let the mysterious man rise. Together they came toward her; and

Gilda, her hands clasped before her on the table, watched steadily as they came.

Koko was beaming. Evidently he had not expected this condescension, and his hard-won grandeur, his attitude of man of the world, could not stand against it. His grin, as he approached, was that of a small boy showing off his uncle, the V.C. He looked from blue eyes to golden, and brought out the name gloriously.

"Mr. Marmion Poole!" said Koko, pride almost choking his voice. Then, suddenly, in another tone: "What? What is it? Anything wrong?"

For Gilda was standing up, very white, very quiet. She said only:

"I'm sorry. I don't wish to know Mr. Poole." And to Koko, taking up her shawl in a steady hand, "I'll just go and tidy if I may."

She turned away without haste toward the door of the cloakroom.

It was over in ten seconds. There had been no scene. Gilda had spoken in a low voice. Marmion Poole had bowed. Save on the face of K. K. Fry, the incident had left no more trace than a shadow that darkens and goes past. He only of the three was shocked out of self-possession. He stammered, facing Marmion:

"Sir—I don't know what to say. She must be off her head."

Marmion checked him with a kindly hand on his arm.

"All right, my dear boy! Don't worry! Ten to one she's heard some story or other.

There are stories told of me, I believe. If it's that, I like her for it. There's too little feminine squeamishness these days."

"Yes, but——" Koko's lip drooped like a disappointed child's.

"Don't worry!' Marmion soothed him. "Don't speak of it to her when she comes back." He patted the arm he held. "You'll upset your evening and her and yourself, I know. Never worth upsetting a golden evening! So—no remonstrance! Promise!"

Koko nodded.

He had a taxi waiting when Gilda came down, the miraculous shawl about her shoulders, and on her cheeks a faint flush that came of no beauty specialist's recipe. Silently she crossed the restaurant, silently accepted the ministrations of the small boy with the umbrella, who escorted tall Gilda on tiptoe.

They were in the taxi, and Koko had made several remarks chosen from such harmless topics as weather and Middlesex's latest score, before she broke her silence.

"I always did like cricket," Koko was saying. "I like these slow games that don't strain the intelligence to watch. Now baseball——"

"Mr. Fry," said Gilda suddenly, "I must apologise for my manners. I know it was unpardonable: and the worst of it is I can't explain."

"Poole?" said Koko Fry lightly. "Never you mind about that. Do him good."

"Yes," Gilda answered. "But if it does

you harm? You're his Press agent, aren't you?"

"Don't you worry," said K. K. Fry comfortably. "Poole's not that sort. He didn't mind. He—sort of liked it. When every woman you meet only asks to be your doormat, a bit of a snub makes a nice change."

"You're most awfully kind," said Gilda, and her voice wavered on the schoolgirlish phrase.

"Rot!" said K. K. Fry. "Bunkum! Here we are! Where's the fool going?"

He leaned out of the taxi window and elaborately directed the driver, who explained in a few simple words that regard for the traffic regulations and his licence did not permit him to follow his fare's advice. Gilda, hastily dabbing at her telltale eyes, blessed the opportune dispute and the blindness of man. She had yet to learn, the old-fashioned woman, that modern man is anything but blind.

CHAPTER SEVEN — "ONE, TWO, BUCKLE MY SHOE"

I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the tongs and the bones.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

THEY arrived. They passed into the brilliant foyer, jostled with the horde past a medalled Cerberus who took the tickets from K. K. Fry and, unimpressed, murmured—"Stalls *on* the left, *if* you please!" Gilda noticed, and said nothing. In her quiet and dowdy fashion she liked grandeur. She liked being offered caviar and peaches; she liked taxis and seats in expensive stalls; finally she liked K. K. Fry, was grateful to him, and very much determined to please. Already the curtain was up. They took their seats amid a stunning din.

"What's happening?" Gilda asked loudly.

"What?" K. K. Fry returned, shouting.

"Where have they got to?" Gilda asked. "Have we missed any of the plot?"

"No, it's all right," he reassured her. "That comes later."

"What?"

"Plot!" returned K. K. Fry at the top of his voice, and sank back sideways as the din subsided. Gilded doors at the top of a flight of steps slid apart, and a glittering young woman, striking an attitude between them, began to sing out of tune to the rustle of drums.

Gilda Bedenham's impressions of her first musical comedy scene may be recorded as follows :

The inhabitants of the play live in a palace, but are more than kind to their servants, who take an interest, often vocal, in all that goes on. There is one handsome man, and one very plain one ; but the plain one works harder. The handsome man may be tragically rude to one glittering girl, but the plain man is comically rude to all the glittering girls and specially rude to the large chaperon, which enchants the audience, for the large chaperon is unpopular with audience and inhabitants alike, probably because she never sings. Everybody else sings. Some cannot ; but all do.

And all, without exception, have that bewildering and tiresome difficulty with their shoes.

The hero, slender, undersized, with an American accent, trips as he approaches, lilting a love song, the lady of his affections, and attempts, heel against toe, to remove his shoes. In vain he clicks and double-knocks upon the floor, bends his ankles sideways, backwards, upwards, wriggles loosely from the knee, from the waist, from the shoulder : his shoes adhere. It does not occur to him to stoop and use his hands : these are in his pockets or flung out on a level with his shoulders as he balances on one leg trying to kick off his foot-gear with the other : nor will he lift his shoe to a chair and so preserve his balance. No, the shoes must be kicked or wriggled or waggled off ; it is a matter of

honour. He gets little sympathy; the lady indeed rocks her ankles, but she does not actually attempt to remove her own foot-gear; she is occupied in the even more difficult task of controlling her knees. They are slim knees, delightfully fringed in whirling skirts; but they are knees uncontrolled. They tend to jerk upwards, jack-in-the-box fashion, and did she not slap them smartly downwards at quarter-second intervals, they would be hitting her under her small chin.

The frantic efforts of the troubled couple attract the languid interest of the chorus—which consists of houris who, obviously, all go to the same inspired dressmaker—and even rouse in them some spirit of emulation. "If you must take off your shoes," they imply, "this is how perfect ladies do it." And with that the forty houris sway forty stockingless but exquisitely shod left legs to the boxes on their right, and forty stockingless but exquisitely shod right legs to the boxes on their left; but they do not succeed in removing their shoes. So with rising annoyance they proceed to spurn the orchestra and the audience with alternate feet: implying that Moab is their wash-pot and over Edom have they cast their shoes.

The audience takes the insult meekly: not so the orchestra. An admixture of noises realistically representing the resentment of a pride of lions, a muster of peacocks, a covey of grouse, a gaggle of geese, a ripple of hyenas, a herd of swine, a flock of sheep, a dance of

elephants, a pack of wolves, and a cry of women, is the orchestra's answer : some of its members even rising from their seats in their excitement and thrusting ahead of them their particular instruments of torture, much as the priests and Levites trumpeted to Jericho its doom. The houris, shuddering, accept the situation, link arms, and, still kicking convulsively, flee the scene : the last to leave being the original foot-sore couple. The orchestra roars its triumph. The curtain falls.

"I call that dancing," said Koko proudly, turning to his dazed companion. "They say those two get a thousand a week. Great, aren't they?"

"Great, oh, great!" said Gilda, as one grasping thankfully at a verbal straw.

"I thought it would get you," said Koko benevolently. "Artists, those two! Did you ever see such footwork?"

"Never," said Gilda fervently.

He rewarded her.

"You ought to dance, you know," said Koko thoughtfully. Then, warming : "We must do something about it. Got a gramophone? No? Well, that doesn't matter—I'll lend you mine—no, that's all right, I'd like to——" And he continued to outline the higher education of his dazed companion till the curtain rose again.

Now the British musical comedy, like the British constitution, is no light fabrication. It is devised to give the British playgoer his

money's worth, and prides itself on fulfilling its rôle. It does not give a plot, that not being in the bond ; but there is little else that it omits ; and Gilda, belatedly realising this, began as the second act progressed to enjoy herself. Drunkenness disgusted her in real life ; yet she found herself first smiling, then chuckling, and finally disintegrating into undignified laughter at the equally gradual and equally undignified disintegration of the water-fly on the other side of the footlights. She had an acute ear, yet found that the resolute out-of-tuneness of the principal lady ceased to afflict her. Clothes did not interest her, yet she couldn't help commenting —and to Koko too—on the dresses, and then upon the dresses, and yet again upon the dresses. Indeed, so worked up was she that she actually volunteered the information that Beethoven's Seventh Symphony was also an experiment in syncopation. She mentioned Dalcroze ; she pointed out to the delighted Koko that the languid pedestrianism of the chorus appeared to be quite definitely and deliberately related to the more complicated evolutions of the principal performers : and concluded, as she wiped her tearful eyes during a scene between the countess and the bus-conductor, with a reference to Bergson's Theory of Laughter more indulgent than respectful.

" It's a good show," agreed Koko, deeply flattered. " I haven't laughed so much since father died."

This uncalled-for callousness shocked Gilda,

who could not reconcile it with her conception of her friendly acquaintance.

" Wasn't he—kind to you? " said Gilda at last gently.

" Who? " said Koko staring.

" Your father," said Gilda.

K. K. Fry, astounded at this interpretation of his very usual, if colloquial, expression of appreciation, stood for a moment agape. Then, belatedly remembering the height of her brow, cast back to Shakespeare for an explanation of the quip.

" Kind? " said he. " Well, hardly. He was a little less than kin, you see."

" Oh, your stepfather? " said Gilda, encouragingly.

K. K. Fry, gave it up, and—the performance ending ten minutes later with the chorus shaking its disdainful toes and an unintelligible farewell roared by the principals, among whom the conductor and the countess might have been observed arm in arm, and obviously on excellent terms—he seized her elbow, urged her into a taxi, and shouted a familiar direction before she had time to question what the next move should be.

The small bebuttoned boy, faithful to his umbrella, though the night was fine, rushed forth to greet them. Within, Pasquale, viewing them across a roomful of notorieties, advanced with the manner of a majordomo summoned by royalty, and bowed them to the most coveted table.

"And what will madame take?" asked Pasquale, unsheathing his tablets.

"What does one eat after a musical comedy?" she asked him

The problem was not beyond Pasquale. He had answered it before to the satisfaction of clients; but they were ordinary clients, mere names on hoardings, mere splendours of the stage or pen; not Somebodies with untidy golden hair, the hands of an artist, and the grand manner.

"I make you," said Pasquale, after thought, "little sausages, *cipollata*, cook very dry, with a *mousse* of potato: and you drink nice lager, light not dark."

To this plan the magnificent Gilda acceded; and, when the Bougainvillea's version of a homely dish was placed before them and formally blessed by its provider, Koko and she began to talk.

No purpose would be served by recording their conversation. Its tone was trivial yet friendly, and, as the nice light lager sank in the tall glasses, they ventured upon a little helpful criticism. Thus Gilda learned the address of a little man off Oxford Street who did permanent waving very reasonably: and of a little woman in South Molton Street who sold French models to the trade. Koko Fry was made to understand exactly why blue, and bright blue in particular, was not his colour; and that one does not use the term undergrad in speaking of younger members of the university.

Delighted to find, after this excursion into the dangerous realm of personalities, that their friendship showed no trace of strain, each talked of things that went deeper, of ambitions, hopes, fears ; and by the end of the evening, so secure, so confident had they grown in their new relationship, that Gilda even ventured to intrude upon those sacred precincts of the male—payment of the meal and the due rewarding of the meal's attendant. K. K. Fry was accustomed to ladies who looked tactfully away when the bill was paid, and feigned indifference to the waiter's subsequent bow. But Gilda, in the flush of her new liking for him, forgot to be tactful. She stretched out one long hand to the bill beneath which he had slipped a furtive note, and turned it back so that both note and total and the intolerable discrepancy between the two stood nakedly revealed.

"But you can't"—said Gilda horrified—"you can't give him all that!"

"Usual thing, isn't it?" murmured K. K. Fry.

"Usual? Of course not!" said Gilda, with calm. "Ten per cent.'s plenty. He'll give you change. Won't you?" she asked blandly of Pasquale.

That dignitary smiled, eagerly provided change, and attended the couple to the door, which he held open in person, an honour paid to no more than seven of the Bougainvillea's most esteemed clients. K. K. Fry, following Gilda, and noting the tribute with wonder and

pride, felt, despite his sufficient conceit of himself, somewhat forlorn. His sophistication and her simplicity, the hedge-school of Fleet Street and the cloisters of Oxford—how could these ever come together, save momentarily, soon to part? For a moment he doubted; then, certain reassuring factors coming to his mind, such as laughter in common and a liking for lager beer, he took courage. Extremes meet, thought K. K. Fry, a good deal oftener than fools think: more especially if a born organiser is in charge of the meeting.

CHAPTER EIGHT — A DINNER OF HERBS

My genius is rebuked.

MACBETH.

IT is, thought Marmion, watching from his window the limousined arrival of Horrie Pedler—it is the poet's curse that the world will take him literally. No doubt Horrie Pedler was late because she, too, had taken him literally. When Marmion Poole told Horrie's luncheon party that he had taken a house at the world's end, he did not expect them to take him literally: it was a poet's phrase, flung out in some sort as statement—for he did indeed live in riverine Chelsea—but principally to suggest his own spiritual remoteness.

"Poole at World's End!" Oh, lucky biographer of Marmion Poole, who, one day, would happen on the phrase in his, Marmion's public-private notebook, and use it as the key and title for his "Life of a Poet." Strachey now—a younger Strachey: a Strachey without that sinister something—egotism, was it, or perverted sense of humour?—that would prevent his perfect comprehension of "Poole at World's End."

"Poole at World's End!"—a mere phrase, but was it not a fair phrase? Yet he could not avoid the suspicion that his biographer, when the time came for a biographer, would

probably be literal about it, as literal as that abominable Rosalba Fennell, who had at once launched forth into reminiscences of some real World's End that he had never heard of, situated beyond the worst horrors of King's Road. She had, it appeared, "rested" there in chorus-girl days, and she talked purlieus with him till he could have screamed—and so to the affecting woes of chorus girls. Had it not been for Philibert Foulger she would have had him on one of her committees before the lunch was over. Yes, indeed: a lovely woman who is a literal woman is that Death-in-Life of whom Coleridge wrote so feelingly, perpetually exciting, only perpetually to kill imagination.

"I had a bed-sitting-room once at the World's End——" Thus Rosalba! Well, and if Rosalba Fennell's pert-nosed, golden-haired perfection had once rested in the abominable Chelsea curtilage which so monstrously assumed a name consecrate to poetry, what was it to him? His was another world's end.

Marmion stood looking out upon his world's end as he waited for Horrie Pedler, and found it good. Some old sherry helped him. He did not turn, though he heard the clatter of arrival, till Elwes's voice announced his guest.

Then——

"The world's end! Worth the journey?" he asked, unmoving, of the movement behind him.

Horrie Pedler, bundling in, tumbling in, nervously apologetic for her lateness, Horrie,

blinking her way through the unlighted spaces of the big room, was caught for the hundredth time by Marmion's capacity for being the centre of the picture.

She paused and looked at him with pleasure.

He stood, one hand resting on the smooth shoulder of the Pomona—the faceless Pomona that he had dug out of some Paris atelier—and let the London night fling ripples of light and shade upon his face. It was an effect of the faint mist that rose from the river, or the movement of the river itself as it poured past the window in black and silver alternations like a hurrying snake. If this were the near side of world's end, then the left bank was the farther end, so dimly outlined was its range of trees and buildings, so fused with twilight its pompous upper range of heavy cloud. Twinkling lights starred the purple ranges; the golden lower lights were lamps; the silver upper lights were stars. Through the right window of the bay could be seen the ghosts of towers that breathed flame and smoke upon the night. The exhalations rose steadily upon the windless lilac air until they reached the moon. Flame and smoke and starry twilight and white metallic moon fused, distorted, duplicated in the glass of the half-opened French windows, were a proper background for Marmion Poole, thought Horrie. The elements presented him as their incarnation. With his white face, white hands, white teeth, bright eyes, bright ring, bright hair, and black-clad

body, he was indeed a creature of the world's end. Horrie Pedler would have scarcely gaped if Marmion, at sight of her, had turned on his heel, and, walking out of the window, run up the ladder of smoke into the very sky. If you step off at the world's end, what is left you but a visit to the moon?

Horrie said what she thought, startlingly, but with complimentary exactitude, and Marmion, much moved, shook hands warmly. This was his own Horrie! He told his Horrie the story of Rosalba Fennell and her bed-sitting-room, and told it well. "To each his own World's End!" said Marmion.

It was then that Horrie chuckled. Connoisseur that she was, she had enjoyed the picture presented to her, and yet had comprehended the deliberate intention that had created it for her benefit. Marmion was in a mood. It was a mood that required attention and affection, a mental cushion or two placed behind his head, and a human looking-glass in front of him. She sighed as she regarded her old friend, haloed by the obliging moon. She could not give him what he wanted. She had, with such genuine regret, arrived to curse and not to comfort. There could be no cushions and no looking-glass for Marmion to-night.

She said, sighing gustily:

"Publishing's a dog's life. I wish I'd been a maiden aunt."

"But you are," said Marmion, "aren't you? At any rate, an aunt?"

"I mean," said Horrie, decoating herself, "as a profession there's nothing like it. An aunt can do what she pleases. You don't need tact with children; you smack 'em all soundly and send 'em to bed—and all scores cleared by the morning. But I'm a literary maiden aunt, with grown-up children who spill the ink——"

"Who's been spilling ink?" said Marmion crossly, not looking at her.

"Oh, *you* know," said Horrie, cosily but firmly—and removed more wraps.

She emerged from her conglomeration of shawls, a not unhandsome aunt indeed, Victorian in face, Edwardian in figure, and extremely Georgian in her manner of attack. Her bright blue eyes shone from under her thatch of yellow-grey hair like robins' eggs out of a nest; her large nose was reddened with the cold; her small mouth wore an expression characteristic of her—determined yet rueful. Marmion, noting the expression, became uneasy. Something was up. Horrie was not comfortable in her mind. He knew her. If her discomfort had nothing to do with him it would not be difficult, indeed, to prevent her worrying him with her own uninteresting affairs. Horrie, though sixty-five, was as easy to snub as a schoolgirl. But if it had anything to do with him—'ware trouble! He had looked forward to his dinner; but he began to wonder whether he would enjoy his dinner. He hastened to protect himself in advance.

" Look at the night ! " said he movingly, and drew her into the bay.

She said—as moved as he :

" Write it, Marmion ! You could."

And again he wondered at her infinite capacity for accepting and adopting his mood ; and again he realised how completely in opposition to his own impulses were the streams of thought that drove her so easily to accept his mood.

" Yes, I could," he admitted.

" Well, then, write it ! "

" Verse again ? "

" Why not ? "

" I've given up verse," said Marmion.

" Why ? "

" Too old."

" Rubbish ! Old ? " Horrie swung round to look at him. " Wait till you're sixty-five before you say you're old. You—at fifty ! A mere chicken ! "

She eyed him with the friendly admiration that always, because of its affectionate dispassion, disconcerted him.

" You don't look forty—not by moonlight. Why shouldn't you write me another *Devil's Buttonhole* ? "

" That required Flora," said he, " as well as moonlight."

" Poor Flora ! " said Horrie.

" Dear Flora ! " said Marmion.

" But still there's always a Flora," said Horrie, without cynicism. She was merely stating a

fact. And then: "Can't you find yourself another Flora, Marmion?"

"I dare say."

"Ah, but I mean a permanent Flora. I wish you'd marry, Marmion."

"Would you envy my wife?" said he, watching her, and as usual puzzled by her. Was it possible that such a fool as Horrie could be so wise? that such elderly ingenuousness could yet be so experienced, so worldly, so sound?

"I think so," Horrie was replying seriously. "Not ten years ago: it would have been hell for her ten years ago. But now—at fifty? Oh, yes. I think so. She'd have an exciting life, and that's better than a happy one. Besides"—she was still looking at him with her friendly eyes—"your bark's so much worse than your bite, Marmion. I know that."

"And if I took a wife she would prove it to the general public at last?"

"Something like that." Horrie turned from the window.

"Take a wife and write poetry! Horrie's advice to the middle-aged. What's wrong with prose, Horrie?"

"Prose or—your prose?" said Horrie guiltily.

So it was to be his affair! He winced inwardly while he laughed.

"Anything wrong with my prose?" he demanded.

"I'd like a cocktail," said Horrie uncertainly.

"They're over there," said he, not moving.

She went across to the tray.

"What's wrong with my prose, Horrie?" said Marmion, with his wheedling smile.

She, too, smiled, but uneasily, as she poured and drank.

"I—I want to talk to you about it—about the new book. At least—it's not a book yet, is it? It's more in the nature of a—of sketches—a synopsis? But can't we do it over food? Where did you get your grape-hyacinths, Marmion? What a potful! Pure turquoise! Aren't they lovely? Oh, but let's eat first!" And then: "But it is poetry that gives you your best chance, you know. You're your best self in poetry. It's a long time now since *The Buttonhole*."

She was too anxious, too friendly, too nervous! Something was very wrong. Knowing her astonishing affection for him, he recognised the symptoms. Horrie was going to hurt him and hated her job. And yet—damn the woman!—she would never dream of shirking her job. He felt a child's angry resentment at this efficient nurse-maiding.

"Are we going to have a lecture on the whole duties of poetry from the soup on?" said he sulkily; and she answered in her ready, cheerful tones:

"We needn't discuss business at all if you're not in the mood."

"Better get it over," he growled.

She said, "Well, we've got to thrash it out sooner or later," as Elwes opened the door to the dining-room.

Respite for Marmion! He sighed thankfully as they settled down to the exquisite meal. The polished walnut of the dining-table reflected the candle-flames sharply, and more dimly the golden mimosa that shot up from the Sheraton bowl between Marmion and his guest.

Cantaloup—omelette—Marmion chattered over both, scarcely tasting. Horrie, who liked food, ate solidly. The delicate wine flushed her cheeks; she grew younger as she listened and laughed attentively. He thought, as he looked at her, that after all it was a pleasure to be liked as Horrie liked him—because she chose to, without requiring him to make any effort. She had precisely the same attitude to him to-day as she had had for fifteen years. It was disconcerting, of course, that she had not fallen in love with him: that was an error of taste and judgment which he found it difficult to forgive. He had done his best to punish her, too, in ways he knew; but she had continued to like him with a determination that no whim of his could shake. It pleased another side of his vanity that this should be so. It was unusual, and he appreciated the unusual in relation to himself. Also, the failure to be in love with him did not prevent his being able to upset her. Horrie, past sixty, was still sensitive; and as she invariably refused to show a wound, it made all easy. She did not hold with reproaches; so he could always upset her with a perfectly clear conscience. He proceeded to do so now.

"And how goes business?" blandly he inquired.

She was the enthusiast for a moment, her mission forgotten.

"Such an interesting autumn list," she began. "There's Plouter's new thing, and Philibert's *Three Plays in Camera*, and Selina's, if she gets it finished before the baby——"

"Gimcrackery, in fact," he interrupted placidly. "What the public expects of its pedlars, from Autolycus on. 'Any toys for your head——' How does the jingle go? A little odd, compared with former lists. Still, one must hope that, at least, dear Horrie, you're making money."

But devastatingly, as only Horrie could, she swept the innuendo aside.

"Marmion, I want to talk to you."

At that he panicked. His vanity winced like a tooth in anticipation of the dentist's drill. He temporised:

"Dearest Horrie! I love to hear you talk. But not yet, dearest Horrie! A peach first, Horrie! 'A plum, a cherry, and a fig! There's a good grandam.'"

She fixed him with her bright eyes.

"They won't do, Marmion."

At that he flushed scarlet. His tone and his whole manner changed.

"What do you mean?" he interrupted. "What won't do?"

"I can't publish them."

"Them? What them? Give me a noun, can't you?"

He spoke rudely ; but she wiped all suggestion of retort from her voice as she answered :

" *Reflections*. Your memoirs. They won't do, Marmion."

" Oh ? "

" I'm terribly sorry, Marmion."

" Oh ? "

His finger and thumb, pressing the peach between them, suddenly met, and the rich fruit spurted and broke. He dropped it back on to the plate, and stretched out his hand to the little bowl of glass beside him, rinsed off the juice and adhering sliver of torn red peach-skin, wiped his hands elaborately, and surveyed his finger-nails as he returned to the charge.

" Dear Horrie, I'd hate to leave you ; but —there *are* other publishers ! If my new book doesn't please you, it at least pleases me. And I'm quite convinced in my own mind that it will please others, just because it's the best thing I've ever done or ever shall do. If it doesn't please you, why—I have only to regret it and go elsewhere."

She leaned her firm chin in her hand.

" Dear Marmion, would it do you any good to go to Bullaford and Hurst's ? They are the only people in London who would take them. Would it do you any good to be advertised as they'd advertise you ? Sensation headlines ; the wrong puffs ; a best seller in the little furtive pornographic shops? Marmion, you can't be in that crowd. Even then I doubt if they'd risk it. Libel actions are expensive publicity."

"Oh, if you're nervous——" he began, and stopped.

There was a silence—an odd silence. Horrie darted a worried look at him and saw an unfamiliar Marmion, a Marmion with a face expressionless as a mask. This distressed her anew; and as a managing woman it worried her too; for she had proposed, before the evening was over, to manage him for his own good, and she could not begin until she knew what he was thinking. She said at last, questioning, inviting:

"Marmion——"

Slowly his face changed and relaxed; but it did not weaken. It was as if he had come to a decision.

"Marmion——" said Horrie. "Please——"

"Is it chapter five?" said he reluctantly, not looking at her.

"Partly."

"Or the Dupuits business?"

"That's one of the things."

"I'm not headstrong, Horrie," said he slowly, and began peeling another peach: "I'd be willing to be—advised, I'd bowdlerise—within reason."

She shook her head. "It's more than that. It's the whole tone of the book."

"What's wrong with the tone of the book?" he demanded angrily.

"It's unworthy," she said. "Unworthy of you, at any rate."

"Fudge! How?"

" It's too vindictive to be clever. You show your wounds, Marmion. You can't afford to do it. You mustn't pussy-cat."

" *The Gentle Art*——" he began.

" Ah, *The Gentle Art* was a masterpiece ; but yours is an ungentle art. I can't let you publish it, Marmion, for your own sake."

" It's the age of personalities," he said. " You employ a Koko."

" It's a book that will disgrace you, Marmion, and me. I can't publish it."

" What's your real reason ? " said he coldly. " Tell me the truth ! You're a business woman, and I've offered to bowdlerise. What's wrong —squeamishness apart ? What's wrong with my book ? "

She pulled up her chin and looked at him. " It's badly written, Marmion."

At that he whitened as he said with extreme precision in a gentle voice : " Horrie, you're a very old friend, but——"

" Yes, that's why. I'm your very old friend. Listen to me, Marmion. What earthly need can I have to tell you unpleasant truths except that they are truths, and that I like you enough to tell them ? I've published every book you've given me."

" At a price," said he.

" Well, my dear, I've not made so much money on you," said Horrie, still looking at him with her firm and rueful smile.

" But kudos, you have."

" Exactly. But this won't bring me kudos,

or you. Now listen to me, Marmion. I'm as proud as Punch of you. I always have been. You know that. You know what I think of you at your best. I've proved it enough, I think. But now I'm going to prove it better than I've ever done. I'm not going to publish *Reflections*. It would disgrace you and it would disgrace me. Don't you know, my dear boy, that you can't write to hurt and only to hurt without ruining your style? What you feel and think comes out in your work. And, Marmion, you've been feeling and thinking—shoddy! What possessed you, Marmion, to write such a book? What possessed you to think such a book? What's happened to you to conceive such—such cheapness?"

"I remember my enemies," said he.

"Enemies? What enemies?"

"People who have injured me."

"Now how has poor Eliza Point injured you?"

"If you'd read *Reflections* carefully," said he, "you'd know, wouldn't you?"

"But she did it out of pure kindness."

"It was a pity that the results were so entirely unsuccessful."

"Only a blunder."

"Don't you know your Bible, Horrie? He that is a knave shall be beaten with many stripes: he that is a fool shall be beaten with few. You observe that I let her down quite lightly. Just a few stripes! Dear Eliza! Do her good!"

And he smiled widely at Horrie Pedler, who for her part sat back in her chair staring at him with an expression that he could not read. But she soon enlightened him.

"I'm shocked," said Horrie in a high, agitated voice. "You can laugh, but I am."

Her voice shook. If she looked younger than her years as she listened to Marmion on the proper preparation of chicken salad, now as she fingered a walnut she looked a hundred, a shaken woman, a grandmother unnerved. But she returned to the attack stubbornly, for all she was shaken.

"I can't believe it," said Horrie. "I've known you since you were twenty-five, and liked you so much——"

"So much——" said he, still with that wide smile.

"But this—this side of you——"

"No idea, had you?" said he.

She replied, too worried to be tactful:

"Don't speak to me like that, dear Marmion! Don't just because I've hurt your vanity——"

"Another insult?" said he, and bowed gallantly.

Her eyes began to fill; but she ploughed on.

"Dear Marmion, think! Consider—consider where it leads!"

"For one thing, it leads to money," said he. "My memoirs will sell."

Horrie broke in passionately:

"Money? Is that all? As if that couldn't arrange itself! Listen to me, Marmion! Have regard to your own good. The firm will advance

you—carry you—finance you as long as you please. Money!"

He continued just as if she had not spoken:

"To money—and to—getting my own back, as the man in the street says. Money, and my own back! Two things I like."

She stared at him, and half put up her hand as if he had thrown stones at her and was preparing to throw more. But he saw the gesture, understood it, and, lightning-fashion, his mood appeared to change. He smiled at her and spoke to her in a tone kind, but firm and friendly, though still it had an edge.

"Dear Horrie, don't distress yourself! It's most charming and womanly and all that; but, after all, you're not the only publishing house, you know. Pedlar's Pack is the firm of firms—for classics! But it's just possible that my book requires more—modern handling."

But he could not hurt her, even if he had intended to hurt her, and she was not sure that he had so intended. She was, at any rate, too intent upon saving her own affection for him from outrage to care. She said:

"Marmion, can't you see? Even if they publish—and no one will publish—you'll hurt yourself so in reputation. After all we've retrieved for you——"

"We?" said he coldly.

She corrected herself humbly, eagerly.

"No, no, I don't mean we. You yourself. All you've retrieved for yourself. Of course it was you—your own talent, your own power

of recovery. Look at my luncheon ! A sign of the triumph ! You got back everything. You re-established yourself. Why wreck it all now ? Your return, your reputation, your success ? What for ? What do you get in exchange ? "

" My own back ! " said he, smiling at her.

She rose on that. A chair toppled, napkins scattered. She was an old woman moving impetuously like a girl, as she came round the table to him.

" I beg you, Marmion——"

" It's all right, Horrie ! "

" Marmion, if you have any affection for me——"

" We all adore you, Horrie—so earnest and all that——"

" I have done what I could. Listen to me, Marmion ! I'm a business woman. I haven't had time for other things ; but my one pleasure has been my friends. A woman like me—I've no time for emotion——"

" But, my dear," said he, taking her hand and pressing it, " you're all excellent emotion ! Religious emotion, business emotion, friendly emotion——"

" Yes," she said, not understanding him, " I am a good friend. I think I am a good friend. And I'm too good a friend to let you ruin yourself—twice ! "

And because she was so good a friend she said that word " twice " with a boldness and a firmness that he disliked. He found it menacing. He looked down at her.

"Twice?" he said. "I don't understand you."

"There was no need that you should. I never meant to have told you."

"Told me what?"

"But now I've got to tell you," she said, "to save you from—pure folly."

"What have you been doing," said he, "behind my back? For, whatever it is, Horrie, you must tell me, and it must stop."

"You were abroad——" she faltered.

"And now I'm back in England; and I'm grateful to you, of course; but from now on—I run my own show."

"This was Flora's show," said she, low-voiced.

"What's all this?"

She said uncomfortably, not at all in triumph:

"Marmion! Gilda Bedenham is Flora's child."

He gasped.

"Flora's?"

"Flora's! Yours!"

He stared at her. Then his face hardened.

"I don't believe it," said Marmion furiously.

Horrie said nothing.

"Well?" cried Marmion.

"Well, Marmion?" said she.

"Oh," he cried, "how maddening you are! I'm waiting. Aren't you going to tell me about it?"

She sighed.

"It's a very bare story. But after you left England——"

"I had to! You know that!" said he. "I and Flora—— It was over! The affair was over!"

Horrie nodded.

"You never wrote, did you?" said she. "Even I didn't know your address that first year."

He cried:

"I tell you it was over! But go on!"

"Well," said she, "it wasn't over for Flora, that's all."

"Why was I never told?"

"She died."

"Ah!" said he, wincing. "But why was I never told? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know at the time," Horrie defended herself hastily. "Only the sister knew. You remember the sister—she brought her up in the Northumberland house. She died when Gilda was sixteen."

"But when did you come into it?" he returned suspiciously.

"She wrote to me—the sister. Her pension died with her. She sent Gilda to school on it. Fond of her, I'm sure. But a remote woman. Dying, she worried about Gilda's future, and then she sent for me. I was thankful to be able to relieve her mind. I promised her to see to things—Oxford and so on. It was no use telling you then, Marmion. It was too late."

"And what has my daughter lived on, the last three years?" said Marmion.

Horrie blushed.

"On you?" He frowned as he pressed the question.

Horrie burst in:

"She's not had much, Marmion. Only just enough to live on. I settled a little on her, just to make her safe. Of course she hasn't a notion; and she mustn't have. Oh, you don't know these young moderns—so high-spirited, so sensitive—she'd be furious with me. She'd be—brutally angry—she'd say things! They're all so proud nowadays, the children," wailed Horrie. "They won't let you look after them."

"But why," said Marmion, "did you undertake it?"

"I liked her," said Horrie, piteously apologetic, "and Flora and you—friends of mine. I liked you all."

They confronted each other, remote as a woman on earth from a man in the moon: their codes were as far apart. Then she said slowly—and her expression changed and she lost her air of apology:

"You're my old friend and client. I've had a duty to you. I still have—at least, I see it so. That's why I'm stopping you——"

He broke in: his thoughts had not caught up with her change of tone.

"Does anyone know?"

Horrie shook her head.

"Does she know—about me?"

"Of course not," said Horrie, shocked. "I wouldn't burden the child." And then, with the brisk decision of manner that her clients

knew, that her office knew, that the whole business world that revolved about her knew, she said serenely :

" That scandal, Marmion, will never be raked up any more than any other scandal will be raked up."

He looked at her, understanding.

" A threat ? Unless I withdraw my memoirs you'll use what you know ? Is that it ? "

She answered placidly :

" Don't be ridiculous ! Of course it's a threat. I must use some weapon. You're a much cleverer human being than I am. You'll get the better of me unless I use a weapon like that. What are weapons for but to fight with ? I may be a fool to bother myself about you at all ; but if I choose to be a fool, I will be. I'm not going to let you make a fool of yourself if I can stop it. And thank God I can."

" Oh, you think you can, Horrie, do you ? "

" I know I can," said Horatia Pedler. " It's an ugly story, it would do you infinite harm, even at this time of day."

" You'd better send me back my manuscript," he said.

She nodded.

" Of course I will. But you're not to publish it."

Then impulsively she put her hand on his arm.

" I'm so sorry for all this, Marmion. I've infuriated you, of course. I must seem a most tiresome old woman. But it's because I'm old that you must listen to me. I've seen a lot of

life, Marmion, and, believe me, I've never known anyone find it worth while—spitting! You're cutting off your nose to spite your face. And it's such a handsome nose, Marmion! It mustn't be allowed." She laughed. "Forgive me. You've shocked me badly; but I'm trying to forgive you, so you must try, too, to forgive me."

She held out her hand. He hesitated, took it, held it a moment, then stooped and kissed it.

She smiled at him, reassured.

"I feel a beast," said Horrie Pedler, using the slang of her remote girlhood. "But when you think it over——"

"I'll think it over," he assured her.

She let him muffle her in her shawls and usher her into her waiting car. She settled in, then leaned forward and spoke to him through the glass.

"Marmion——" she began.

He interrupted.

"Shall I tell him where to go?"

"To the Lovells'. I promised them to go on there. But he knows."

"You'll be early?"

"The show is over early. I'm glad. I like to be in by midnight. Good-bye, Marmion. Think it over! And come and see me! And look, Marmion—I'll read it again too——" For she could not bear to leave him without some hopeful comfort. "My first impressions may be over-strong. Drastic remodelling? That may be a way out."

"There'll be a way out," said Marmion pleasantly. "There's always a way out."

"Come round when you feel like it," screamed Horrie through the window. "Talk it over with the manuscript to hand."

"Right!" said Marmion sharply.

Whether he was answering her or speaking to her chauffeur was unknown. But the car seemed to recognise the order, and it rolled away swifter than the silver snake of river that ran alongside.

Turning impulsively and staring through the little window at the back of the car, she saw Marmion, a dark figure against the white paint of his house, looking after her. He had not moved as the car rolled out of sight.

CHAPTER NINE — COFFEE EXTRA

Farewell, Monsieur Traveller : look you lisp and wear strange suits . . .

AS YOU LIKE IT.

IN a city like London there is no such time as bed-time. A lull, not a lullaby, marks the approach of midnight. The streets are empty, but the traffic never ceases altogether, and the half-lighted shop-fronts and the plane trees under-lit by the perpetual lamps suggest a hospital ward rather than a dormitory. The impulses of millions of Londoners send them to sleep at the different seasons of the night, but there is no mass-repose.

Marmion's impulse sent him to his room at eleven : his late guest, on the contrary, had no notion of resting till three. She might go home at midnight, but, as she told the Lovells, she had half a dozen manuscripts to taste before she went to bed.

" Marvellous Horrie ! " responded her hosts, who did not believe a word of this. " Six manuscripts a night—that makes, let me see, nearly two thousand two hundred manuscripts a year ! "—which confused Horrie, who certainly did not read two thousand manuscripts a year. Yet she did, when the fit was on her,

read and digest six manuscripts in a night. So home she went to her wakeful hours, afoot. For her chauffeur, whom, with her old-fashioned female notions of saving the servants who should be saving her, she had dismissed, when soon after eleven she reached the Lovells', had made his own sulky way home an hour ago, grumbling that eleven o'clock was not ten; and in the course of his lordly and limousined return he held up the omnibus that, in turn, carried Gilda Bedenham home, rather earlier than she expected, to a restless night.

For Gilda had kept her engagement with Koko Fry, and had, indeed, spent a good part of her well-employed week in looking forward to it. She caught herself humming miserable, lugubrious tunes without charm, shape, or meaning, that nevertheless curiously uplifted her, found herself to her bewildered horror, in fact, lilting out echoes of her former evening with Koko. . . .

" I'm no Pola Negri, my looks aren't much,
But once get me going and you'll never de-clutch,

sang Gilda as she worked through the piles of Horrie's manuscripts which Koko had brought her to " taste." Also she bought an admirable and expensive pair of shoes; and, just as they were going out of fashion, some pale pink stockings. These she purchased on her way to the London Library, where she looked up the origin of the Negro spiritual. Finally she

sat down with renewed interest to her piano, and, on the morning of her dinner engagement, wrote out the sketch of a poem for wood-wind and drums, which took these barbaric rhythms into account ; and which she knew, with amazed contentment, was immeasurably the best piece of work vouchsafed her. It made her late for her engagement, since she took, in spite of her hurry, relentless and heroic, though unsuccessful pains with her hair and her hat ; but she arrived at last in the best of tempers, at the modest restaurant upon which they had compromised, and dying to tell Koko Fry all about everything.

It was a slightly depressing café, conducted by two ladies who despised food, and provided it reluctantly as an accessory to their scheme of decoration. In a riot of orange, magenta, brilliant blue, and shrill Eastern green—colours which demanded picturesque foods such as *bortsch*, candied rose-leaves, and small succulent octopi—they offered those standard loathed dishes of the English home : steamed cod, shepherd's pie, and a variety of milk puddings. Gilda, indifferent to meals while her mind still swung to the rhythms of the jungle, hurried toward this rendezvous without misgiving.

Koko was waiting ; so was their table. He hurried to meet and greet her. If his new suit was wraith-like in its unobtrusiveness, her hair, when she took off her hat, her still unfortunate hat, had acquired, to use the phrase of Gilda's newest acquaintance, a demi-wave.

Each was aware of these improvements in the other; each expected comment; and the instinct of each was to bestow comment fulsome in its appreciation; yet each inexplicably refrained. Each then hesitated, finding with dismay that there was so much to be said that there was nothing to say.

"Well, here I am!" said Gilda, at the moment in which Koko, searching for the right word, had decided to say, "Well, here you are!" He wanted to say, "Are you pleased to see me?" as much as she wanted to say, "I am so pleased to see you," but compromised on, "I've got the table."

"Good!" said Gilda, with extreme heartiness.

"Yes, bit of luck, isn't it?" said Koko eagerly, oblivious of the empty tables about them.

"Yes, it is," said Gilda—and remained standing.

"Where will you sit?" said Koko anxiously.

"I don't mind a bit," said Gilda.

"Perhaps you'd like the corner seat?" said Koko.

"Just as you like," said Gilda; and then, brilliantly, "Perhaps you'd rather face the room?"

"I'm not on duty now," said Koko, deeply hurt and not trying to disguise it.

"Oh, I didn't mean that, of course," said Gilda, who had meant exactly that. She had thought it would be kind to show interest in Koko's career. "I just thought that——"

"No, I'd rather you sat where you like," said Koko stubbornly.

They got themselves seated; but the meal hung fire. Gilda was momentarily becoming more sensible of the fact that she had looked forward to seeing Koko again, and was annoyed with him on that account; but was perfectly willing to forget that she was annoyed if Koko gave her any reasonable opportunity of doing so. But Koko was much occupied by the worrying attentions of the waitress; the pauses between the courses; the fact that the street door swung open incessantly so that a draught blew in upon Gilda, who said that it did not matter! But she did, in fact, sit in the way of the draught, and shivered whenever she forgot not to shiver, but utterly refused to let Koko change places with her. The tables about them filled, and their neighbours were gross folk who overheard their conversation and hit the backs of their chairs. There was nothing to be done; but Koko could not help reflecting that, having begun at the Bougainvillea, any more modest restaurant was a mistake. Also, though he did not for a moment expect her to do so, she had clearly not noticed that the colour she had recommended as suiting him did suit him. By the time they reached the faded chicken-curry, he was bitterly disappointed with life, himself, and Gilda. Nothing, said Koko to himself, ever came up to one's expectations; and what was the good of expecting it to? Yet she had waved her

hair. But now that she had waved it he was not altogether sure that it did suit her after all. He thought that she ought to make an effort to talk to him. He had a dozen intimate and personal excitements of the past week to tell her, and now he couldn't even remember what they were!

"Don't think much of the curry," said Koko mournfully.

"It's only a little cold," said Gilda. "Have you had a busy week?"

"So, so," said Koko. "Have you?"

"Fairly," said Gilda.

Suddenly he loathed her Oxford voice.

"I've been reading the manuscripts most of the week," continued Gilda, longing to tell him about the odd throbbing theme in five-eight time that still was swaying at the back of her brain, and beating against the tunes of her speech. And then: "You done any writing?"

"Usual stuff," said Koko. "Interviewed Whittington."

"No, I mean your own?"

"Scribbled a bit," said Koko.

"Oh?" said Gilda encouragingly.

"Yes," said Koko warming, "I began what you said—— Yes, what is it?" This to the waitress.

"Puffs," said the waitress, glad to foil for once a seeker after food, "are off!"

"Queen pudding, then," said Koko, impatiently snatching the menu.

"Queen pudding," the waitress replied, calm with the foreknowledge of victory, "is off."

"What's on, then?" Koko desperately inquired.

"On?" said the waitress, and paused—then launched her *coup de grâce*. "Sago!" said she, and drifted away.

Koko by this time could not be sure whether Gilda's "Oh" had been encouraging or merely polite. He did not wish to risk a snub, so decided to be convinced that she had merely meant politeness and not encouragement, and became a still more wounded Koko Fry. She, on the other hand, was quite subtle enough to take his failure to answer her encouragement in the same spirit as the snub he consciously or unconsciously must have definitely intended to administer—or why not have continued his confidences when the tiresome waitress had gone? She became with equal decision and emotion a wounded Gilda Bedenham. As for telling him of the poem for wood-wind—certainly not! Clearly it wouldn't interest him. She wished he would go to a good voice producer so that his shocking vowel-sounds might be amended. Grey suited him. He was a curiously reserved person. She liked that about him. She had, of course, been too friendly. She couldn't imagine why. She should have remembered her rule—never let yourself be interested in other people's affairs! She had been interested; and he, obviously, had resented it as an encroachment upon his

privacy. Well, it was easy to show him that her interest was a transient one. As for encroaching—that, at least, had never been known as a fault of hers.

"What is the time?" asked Gilda coldly, gathering up her gloves.

So already she wanted to go, although they had not had coffee! It was clear to Koko that she disliked him, that he bored her beyond any hope of re-awaking interest. These high-brows! He supposed she wanted him to talk Latin to her and Dickens and Doric modes! Well, he wouldn't! He was as good as she was even if he wasn't a B.A. and didn't go about with his eyelids drooping and reading scores in buses as if they were plain print!

"Clock seems to have stopped," said Koko, sticking out his chin; and indeed the elaborately gilded cherub clock asserted that the hour was five-fifteen.

"I think I ought to be going," said Gilda colourlessly.

"Won't you have some coffee first?" said Koko.

"Coffee extra," said the waitress, appearing as at the rubbing of a lamp, still eager to foil.

Gilda hesitated. The waitress, mistaking the hesitation's course, drove her point home.

"Fourpence a cup," said the waitress, and followed the thrust with another—"de-caffeinised."

Gilda hesitated no more, but, smiling gratefully at the waitress and hopefully at Koko, said:

"No, I don't think so, thank you very much. But you have some."

But Koko did not interpret correctly the note of encouragement in her voice.

"I loathe and detest coffee," said Koko savagely. "Always have, from a child."

"I like it," said Gilda angrily. "It's my favourite drink."

"Then why not have some?" said Koko, still the host, though bewildered by this feminine contradictiousness.

"I don't feel like it to-night," said Gilda, with an odd little strain in her voice as she accepted from him her more than ever unfortunate hat.

She settled it on her head and waited detachedly while he paid. She did not attempt to superintend his system of tipping; it is possible that Koko would have killed her if she had: he was in that mood. They went out silently through the still energetic door.

On the pavement Gilda turned to him.

"Well, good-bye! Many thanks for a pleasant evening. I have enjoyed it so!"—and shook hands warmly, though encumbered by the umbrella that hung from her right wrist.

"So have I!" said Koko defiantly. And on a last faint hope: "Taxi?"

"There's one," said Gilda helpfully. Then, as it drove up and he motioned her to precede him, "No, I'm taking a bus!"—and with a sudden smile fled across the square to a waiting No. 19.

There was something in her smile—was it defiance, disappointment, comprehension, invitation, farewell?—that stimulated Koko Fry much as the coffee he had missed might have done. It cleared his head. He hesitated, took a hasty step or two after her, paused, watched her masterly, and for all her height not ungraceful, boarding of the already moving vehicle, watched her climb the rocking stairway, watched her drop and recover her umbrella, and, or he fancied it, turn her head toward him from the omnibus top as the vehicle swung out of sight round the draper's shop. Then, inspired, he turned to his taxi driver.

"Seventeen Jordan Street!" said Koko. "And I'll give you five bob if you pass that bus!"

CHAPTER TEN — LULLABY

And being troubled with a raging tooth,
I could not sleep.

OTHELLO.

IN the treatment of that universal scourge influenza it is to be noticed that there is, between the first onslaught upon its victim and its victim's final surrender to the strength of the attack, what is known as " a clear day." On that deceptive day, when the temperature returns to normal or even drops below, the uninstructed patient occasionally believes himself over his troubles, and, disregarding his nurse, gets up, eats, drinks, and defiantly enjoys himself, vaunting his quick recovery. He does not vaunt it long.

As with influenza, so with love. Gilda Bedenham, stopping her bus behind the back of the conductor where she wanted it to stop and not where the bus conductor wanted it to stop, strolled dejectedly homewards, her intellect approving the fact that she was well and truly cured of any interest in the weaker sex. She had looked forward to her evening, and her evening had disappointed her. Well, that was that ! Men were not worth bothering her head about anyway. She had indeed thought that Koko—— It had looked as if Koko—— Well, that was that !

She walked down Jordan Street, her head bent, fumbling for her ever elusive key. Still fumbling, she pushed open the iron gate with her elbow, mounted the steps, and nearly fell over the recumbent figure that had made itself comfortable in the small alcove between the pillar and the door. The figure wore a faint-grey suit.

"Koko! What on earth——!" said Gilda, with a joyfulness completely at variance with the recent trend of thought.

"Come for my coffee!" said Koko Fry.

"But of course! How brilliant of you!" said Gilda graciously. "Can you manage the key for me? It's rather stiff."

Koko twisted, turned, triumphed.

"They teach us how to be useful at Borstal," said Koko.

Gilda laughed, and he laughed too. Indeed, their mutual laughter was out of all proportion to the humour of the remark.

They entered together, proceeded hilariously along the passage and down the melancholy stairway into the basement back. Gilda turned on the light; Koko lit the gas. Gilda brought out the Cona: Koko made the coffee. No reference was made to the terms of their parting. Influenza had returned upon them in full strength.

Now, just as the influenza patient can give afterwards but a vague account of the hours when his temperature ran high and his dreams were opium-gorgeous and all waking encounters

with the external world a torment scarcely to be endured, so it was with those unaccustomed sufferers Gilda Bedenham and Koko Fry. It is known that they made coffee ; it is a fact that Gilda played to Koko, because he asked her to, till the landlady came down to complain of the airs that basements give themselves. After this incident there appears to have been an interlude of quiet conversation, with, at some period, cocoa. K. K. Fry was undoubtedly the principal talker ; Gilda, the unemotional, was certainly eloquent at one point on the superior value to either Oxford or Cambridge of " the university of life," in which, it appeared, K. K. Fry had graduated with distinction. Koko mentioned his mother. Gilda, her low voice so low that Koko had to sit on the hearthrug to hear it, spoke of hers, and told him where her shawl came from ; and thereupon wept, painfully, first in her hands and then upon Koko's shoulder. Koko continued to do the talking ; but what he talked about neither Gilda nor Koko at any time reported to any third person.

Suffice it that, when Koko reluctantly left the house, Gilda accompanied him to the corner of the road. That he, as a matter of course, escorted her once more to her door ; that on this occasion they passed it and continued to walk blindly through the summer night till they reached the friendly river ; that, having reached it, they continued to pace up and down beside it hour after hour—can only be attributed to the delirium of influenza. But the fact remains

that the June morning was bright in the sky before Koko took Gilda back to Jordan Street for the last time, and that Gilda's long third finger was adorned by the too handsome signet ring that Koko was accustomed to wear upon his stumpy fourth.

She had once told him that men do not wear jewellery, and wondered that he had taken the criticism so meekly. It appears that he had had his answer in reserve.

The answer flashed in the morning sunshine, as the pair parted; but though Gilda Bedenham smiled and nodded and waved, and, with the majestic unconsciousness of influenza, continued to wave, publicly, at the retreating figure of Koko Fry till the figure was no more than a revolving cipher upon the clean slate of Sloane Square, she did not, when the cipher had finally been expunged by a passing lorry, at once go home.

She had two reasons for returning to the Embankment instead of Jordan Street. Exhausted she was by the events of the past hours; yet the remedy for such exhaustion as hers was not rest, but further activity. Koko had walked her tired; but, incredibly, he had not, in seven hours, talked her tired. Indeed, though her feet ached in her alien shoes as Gilda had not known that feet could ache, her mind, senses, soul, and spirit remained in so electric a state of excitement that a return to the camp bed in Jordan Street became an impossible end to adventure. To go back to

Jordan Street would be running out of an Italian campagna into a tunnel.

Thinking this, she rejoiced to remember that it would be, in any case, impossible to obey the last injunctions of Koko, belatedly concerned for her night's rest. She was glad that she had not told Koko that she would be locked out, for already she perceived that, where his women-folk were concerned, he was proudly preparing to revert to the strictest Victorianism, and would have been horrified had he learned that she proposed to continue the perambulation of Chelsea without his escort. But it remained a joyful fact that, though Gilda owned a latchkey, her landlady controlled the bolts of the front door: and shot them at midnight unless otherwise arranged between her and her lodgers. Gilda had failed to arrange otherwise, and to return hammering at six a.m. would jeopardise her tenancy of Mrs. Dummet's basement-back. There were so many modes of conduct ordinary in Bohemia with which she didn't hold; indeed she was a woman singularly lacking in grasp. Gilda was convinced that she would not hold with being roused at dawn. Better, thought Gilda, to breakfast and return, at domesticated shopping hours, unchallenged.

Meanwhile she proposed, a little consciously, telling herself occasionally that while she despised sentimentality, sentiment was a legitimate emotion, to retrace at leisure, mentally as well as in fact, every step of her protracted walk with Koko Fry. Like most impulsive people

whom circumstances have driven in upon themselves, she had an odd, pathetic habit of " learning by heart " swiftly and instantly, beyond possibility of forgetting, the joys that came her way—a picture, a sunset, a kind speech, an admiring look. Here, at last, in a rush, were so many joys come her way that she sat, like Danaë, smothered in gold. But the hoarding instinct was not the less strong in her: she must instantly count and pocket and preserve her gold.

So Gilda Bedenham, blissfully weary and wearily blissful, retraced her steps, recalling as she did so not only every phrase and silence in the walk, but also every detail of her previous acquaintance with her lover.

Pondering his ways, look, voice, and character, his small but well-knit and muscular figure, his alert features, his racy speech, his friendly eyes, his astoundingly mature brain, his personality, so simple, so sincere, so easy to understand, yet so subtle, so unexpected, so profound, she smiled with mature amusement at the remote days of her first encounter, and forgot for ever and for ever, even as she smiled at the ridiculous recollection, that she had once wondered what on earth Horrie Pedler saw in Koko Fry, and had told Horrie Pedler that she, Gilda, saw a scrub of a schoolboy-man with a turn-up nose, a Cockney voice, an inquisitive glance, and a conceit of himself that would provoke St. Charity. Dear—dearest Koko! Gallant Koko! He had, she realised, been all his life much

misunderstood, much undervalued, checked, thwarted, and kept under by the brawny and the brainless—jealous of him one and all! His astonishing broad-mindedness, his capacity to see all sides of a subject shamed her. He could come with her to a Bach concert and intensely enjoy it, and yet see, as, she admitted, till then she herself had entirely failed to see, the healthy value of such a phantasmagoria as *Right Behind*. She meditated for a few moments the possibility of translating the essential quality, the moral urge of *Right Behind* into terms of a prelude, chorale, and fugue. She saw it a moment, plainly, as a possible thing, full of technical difficulties, but not, in spirit, beyond her. Then the thought dropped away again and she found herself once more contemplating the Napoleonic personality of Koko.

She leaned over the parapet and watched the morning light on the water, and turned the dance of the water and the cries of the early gulls into a little tune that pleased her. She was as happy as a bird, but, like a bird, restless in her happiness. She must pause and look, and pause and walk again, to walk off the effervescence of her happiness.

And so she came swinging along the asphalt, silver-gilt in the pure early light, along More's Garden, down toward the Apothecary's Garden : and so past Marmion Poole's grass-green door. As she glanced up at the narrow frontage in curiosity—for had not Koko pointed out

the house, and spoken of the celebrity who lived there, only an hour before?—the grass-green door opened and the owner himself came out.

She knew him, and, though she gave him no gesture of recognition save a vexed hurrying of her pace, their recognition was mutual. Indeed, he started, and his face for an instant wore an expression of alarm, melting into relief. Here, if Gilda had been a sentimentalist or even a worshipper, was clearly enough displayed the expression of a lost child recognising, if not his nurse, at least an acquaintance of his nurse. The expression came and went in a flash, and the girl would not let it interest her; but she saw it and felt angrily and unwillingly, yet as clearly as all who encountered Marmion Poole felt it, the influence of his charm. The morning light was, in its uncompromising illumination, kind to him, for it emphasised his fatigue and curiously diminished his age. He looked like a dissipated boy rather than a tired, middle-aged man. As she walked away, for a moment the thought of him put Koko from her mind, though she reproved herself for the fact.

"He poses before breakfast," said Gilda to herself, "even before breakfast!"

But his face, with its look of intense personal appeal, remained with her and haunted her, for she could not reconcile it with her conception of a man whom, as she told Koko, she had cause to hate and to condemn. Helplessness and

Marmion Poole? Appeal and Marmion Poole? She laughed angrily to herself, and crossed the road again to the river. Then, taken with the idea of seeing the whole broadway of water displayed, turned up the bridge road and on to the bridge itself. In an alcove of the great structure she came to a halt, and, with her elbows on the stone parapet, stared down upon misty Westminster: and thought about the singular though as yet unrecognised genius of Koko, and of the recognised genius of Marmion Poole. She thought that the fact of meeting him was unlucky: he had sent her mind tumbling earthward like a shot pigeon. Former years of memory insisted on recognition; and the problem of the days to come jostled with them for place in her thoughts. The glory of her morning was clouding over.

"I hate him," said Gilda to herself.

She backed as she said it from the bold sweep of a gull almost in her face, and in the movement was aware that someone was standing behind her, for her sleeve brushed against serge.

"I beg your pardon," said Gilda absently, half turning.

"That is for me to do," said Marmion Poole.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

REVEILLE

O my daughter!
That it was folly in me thou mayst say,
And prove it in thy feeling. Heaven mend all!

CYMBELINE.

GILDA BEDENHAM, though surprised alone on Chelsea Bridge at six o'clock in the morning by a man whom she disliked and whose acquaintance she had refused, had not therefore at all the air of being caught at a disadvantage.

The bright sun, playing with unaccustomed intricacies of her newly waved hair and contracting the pupils of her indignant eyes till they showed golden-brown as the gillyflowers in the Apothecary's Garden over the way, might present her for an instant as a dawn nymph dazzled and surprised by day; but when she put up her hand to shade her eyes, and beneath that hand surveyed Marmion Poole, she was the Oxford manner incarnate, the feminine Oxford manner, cold, abrupt, efficient. Stern she was and modern she was, but she was, nevertheless, as overwhelming as the warrior queen at the next bridge-head. If she too had had horses she would have ridden Marmion down.

In one mood to perceive this would have amused him, but he was not at the moment in such mood. This, through her disdain, she

perceived, though she did not allow her perception of it to be seen.

He began, deprecatingly :

" Forgive me ! I followed you. I must speak to you."

" Please let me pass," said Gilda, and instantly recognised, appalled, that she was behaving like a heroine in a melodrama. This was dreadful : this was the result of allowing oneself to talk to a Marmion Poole.

" Will you kindly let me go by ? " she corrected herself, adding roughly, " I don't want to talk to you."

" But you must," said Marmion ; and he said it on a note so eager that to her scornful ear it sounded like theatrical despair. But she herself, she knew, was behaving with equal theatricality. The situation was entirely beyond her ; for though he had let her pass and she had walked briskly away, he kept up with her. On seeing this, she slackened again. She wanted to say, " I'll call a policeman "—only to realise the ridiculous vulgarity of such an impulse. One didn't call policemen. But then one didn't at six o'clock in the morning wander on Chelsea Embankment. It was the sort of situation for which a Second in English provided no guidance.

She made up her mind.

" This won't do," she said, stopping suddenly. " This is being ridiculous. Please, please go away ! " And then, in response to his gesture of appeal and protest : " It's no use, Mr. Poole—

I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"But do you know who I am?" cried Marmion Poole.

"Yes," she said, looking him in the face. "You're my father."

She had cruelly robbed him of his effect, and the knowledge of this lighted his face with a youthening flush of anger.

"Horrie told you!" he cried furiously. "Not fair! It was for me to tell you. Horrie—Horrie—how dare Horrie have told you!"

"It wasn't Miss Pedler," said Gilda coldly. "My aunt told me. She died four years ago. When she was ill she told me. You deserted my mother and I'm illegitimate. Now will you let me go?"

But as she flung at him her oft and oft rehearsed speech—for she had had her angry day-dreams of such a meeting—as she watched the effect of her words, new knowledge came to her. She realised not only that he would not let her go till he had said all that he had the heart and mind to say, but that she had no longer in her heart any wish to leave him. She looked for the first time at her leisure into his face, and realised it as one so like her own that thus she might look at herself in thirty years in her own looking-glass. It was a face, too, so distraught, so unlike the composed celebrity of her occasional glimpses, that she found herself constrained to accord him, if only for the moment, that respect which mere distress, deserved or

undeserved, always demands. If he were in such trouble, then, though her father, she must listen to him.

Here he voiced her thought.

"If you know—because you know—you must let me talk to you."

Because she knew! Because, like it or not, because she was his daughter, he had a claim on her! She had thought so far only of her self-abandoned claim on him. She was singularly moved by this sudden claim of his upon her thoughts and sympathies, though she said only and coldly:

"Very well! But I can't wait long"—and sat down stiffly on one of the deserted benches.

"I only knew myself last night," he began. "When I saw you a week ago I recognised the shawl. I gave it to Flora—to your mother—myself. I wanted to know where you got it; but I never guessed. But last night Horrie told me. I ought to have been told long ago. And I'll never forgive it," cried Marmion, as one evoking a line of defence belatedly, "that I was not told. Everything," cried Marmion, "might have been altered for me if only I'd been told!"

"You knew that my mother was ill," she said.

"I did not know," he cried.

"Didn't you know that I was going to be born?" she demanded.

"No," said he.

"But my aunt told me——" she began uncertainly.

"I'll tell you what she told you," said Marmion, "that I was a frivolling, poaching demi-devil—

> Oh, 'twas my delight in the time of night,
> In the season of the year——

That's how she saw me, didn't she? And your mother was a foolish angel who didn't know the laws of trespass; and I took her primrosing down a primrose path; and, when I got tired of it, left her to find her own way home alone; and I never came back to see if she'd got home safe, or whether the keeper had caught her—her and her primroses! That's what she told you, wasn't it?"

"More or less," said Gilda.

"Well, it's all true," said Marmion, watching her.

She was startled. She was expecting a thousand defences. She was not prepared for that childish and hopeless admission.

"But I remain your father," said Marmion softly. And waited.

Gilda frowned, and glanced up at him with a sharply suspicious flick of her long lashes. It was as if she expected to find on his face some expression, derisive, triumphant, lachrymose, or insincere. But he was looking at her with the bright-eyed expectancy of a dependent—child—natural—beast—bird: and the look, in its humility and its hunger, hurt her.

"What then?" said Gilda roughly, and

turned her eyes from him. But she listened as he said :

" I'm lonely. I have no friends. Friends—what are friends ? So many friends—so many claims—so many creditors—so many debts ! But I could ask for what I wanted from my own flesh and blood," said Marmion, watching her.

A flush rose to her cheek.

" How much do you claim ? " said she.

" Affection——" he began.

" I can't give you affection," said Gilda practically. " You're a stranger to me." But even as she rejected that claim there was a curious note of tenderness in her voice. She was thinking, in fact, of that other stranger, Koko, who had become in a fortnight the centre of her life ; and a little overflow of affection began to trickle its way to the man beside her.

" Give me what you can," said Marmion's tired voice. " Give me, to begin with, acquaintance, occasions, opportunities. Let me visit—let me talk to you ! " He reached the core of his emotion. " Give me "—he finished on a note of hysteria—" the right to talk to you. There are times," cried Marmion, " when I can't bear to be alone."

Gilda leaned toward him.

" Well, you are not alone, are you ? " said Gilda practically. " You can talk to me if you want to. Why not ? It doesn't hurt me. Why do you live alone," said Gilda innocently, " if you hate it so ? "

He said sullenly, "People begin to make claims."

"I shan't," said Gilda.

He looked at her.

"Nor did your mother. You're like her. I ought to have been told. I'll never forgive Horrie."

"She didn't know till my aunt died——" began Gilda.

He caught at her arm impatiently and pulled her to her feet.

"Don't talk of Horrie! Don't waste yourself on Horrie! Talk of ourselves! Talk! I like your voice. You're a singer—player—aren't you? Of course you are. Your hands are like mine, level along the finger-tips. Better hands than mine. Come home and play to me—now. I was going down to the flower market. Flowers—flowers! Flowers are not like friends. You pluck them and pack them and—think, my child, of a feverish grasp round your own cool neck, the huddle of fingers!—that's what my flowers endure as I bring them home from the market. But then I enjoy the pleasure of the merciful. I give them a cup of cold water, and they drink and revive, blameless, unblaming. Flora—the flower—she never blamed either. Nor do you, my child! I see you don't. And I'd miss my flowers for you. Will you come home and play for me, and we'll do without flowers?"

"Now?"

"Now."

Gilda smiled, half puzzled. "So early? Do you know how early it is?"

He bent to her.

"I know why you're out so early. You don't sleep, do you? Nor do I. I'm a bad sleeper. Didn't you sleep last night?" He pressed her arm again, hurrying his speech as he hurried her along. "Now I did last night. Wasn't it strange? I, the sleepless, after a restless midnight, I turned on to my pillow and slept soundly. I only woke half an hour ago and came out to get my flowers, and met you. But you? Does sleeplessness bring you out?"

"I was"—she found an odd pleasure in confiding in him—"I was walking—I was walking to the world's end, father, and back again."

"Did you drink, daughter, at world's end well?" said he, looking at her sharply.

She nodded. "Yes, I drank."

"Happily?" said he.

She nodded.

"Yes. I think I drank happily. I'm bewildered, happy. Yes, I'm happy. I was Gilda Bedenham last night. This morning I'm"—she hesitated—"two hours old. I have no name."

"Ah, you read your Blake," he approved. "Well—and the joy?"

"You'd think it commonplace," she said.

"It?" said he.

"Him," said Gilda. "But he's why I let you do this, talk with me and take my arm and be my father, till the whim ends for both of us,

father. You owe it to a queer little man with the queerest little name. I don't know what I see in him. He's going to be a Dickens, I think. But it's not that. Father, I'm crazy, I'm so happy! Isn't it absurd?" said Gilda Bedenham. "Don't you think it's curious that I think the world and all of—he's not even sure of his aitches! —of a mere publicity agent—a mere Koko Fry?"

He showed no surprise at the name. She realised without rancour, indeed with an instinctive understanding of his nature that surprised her surface mind, that she might love the man in the moon for all he cared, so long as she proposed no departure to the moon. He was interested solely in her reaction to his own personality. Let her be in love with Koko Fry!

"Talent, brains, and an inquisition in his eye, a hungry inquisition," said Marmion. "Yes, it's the Dickens type! A lively opposite for you! A wise enough choice, no doubt," commented Marmion amiably. "I like him. He's busy on my affairs now. Strenuous—willing. I believe he comes to me at nine, by the way. So let us forget him till nine, shall we? Come home to breakfast and play to me!"

And he drew her across the road and up the tessellated steps to his own front door, and there fished for his latch-key. Out it came, and they entered. Marmion caught at the gong-stick as they walked down the wide passage and struck once upon the brazen shield that hung against the stair-head. A note sped humming through the quiet house like a bumblebee.

"Come into my room," said Marmion, and stood back for her to pass.

She liked his room with its wide curtainless windows and its cool walls, and the Roman glassware, whose opalescence intensified the glittering colours of the sky-reflecting stream without; and she liked the odd foreign breakfast array. There was honey, conserves in bright blue, incredibly fragile glassware, peaches piled high on frail dishes, steaming foreign bread, and some little round cheeses. An active manservant hurried with coffee and chocolate, and they sat down and drank; and they talked as they breakfasted in much the same quick unreal intimacy as two strangers who meet in the dining-car of a foreign train. Skilfully Marmion acquainted himself with the main facts of his guest's prosaic history, and mirrored each simple revelation in some reminiscence of his own that duplicated her experience—and emphasised thus the similarity of character between them. He had an air, indeed, of taking refuge in his daughter's simplicity, of saying, from behind the safety of her likeness to himself, "This, you see, is the true Marmion." Then, falling suddenly upon silence, he made her play, walking up and down the long room with noiseless steps, losing himself in the sounds she made.

It was thus, an hour later, that Koko Fry found them. He came in with his inevitable briskness, bright-eyed with lack of sleep and, paradoxically, the coming true of dreams. As he came upstairs his ear had caught the sound

of the piano, and his eye, as he entered the room, mechanically sought in the direction of the piano for Marmion Poole, but the silhouette against the window, instantly and incredulously recognised, was not Poole's. Koko stood motionless, silent, speech and thought stricken dumb together. Marmion watched him, not displeased: he loved to surprise, to be the purveyor of amazement. Then he advanced to Koko, his hand outheld.

"I believe," said Marmion pleasantly, "you have met my daughter?"

Koko took a deep breath, stirred, recovered his wits.

"Mr. Poole," said he, "I've often said it, but now I know—you're a great man!"

Father and daughter laughed on a note so similar, wrinkled their eyes in uniformity so absurd, that Koko chuckled with them. Gilda's hands ran idly upon the piano's keys, echoing laughter in a trickle of ordered sound, an elfin voice befitting the worlds not realised in which, for these few seconds, all three moved.

But another voice was seeking them, travelling toward them at the pace of tragedy. Its shrill summons halted the straying fingers and the laughter. Marmion Poole, stooping to the telephone, listened, uttered one sharp question, and put the instrument down in a strange quiet.

"Children," said he, "it's Savory. He wants me. They've found Horrie—dead."

CHAPTER TWELVE — DEATH BY MISADVENTURE

Seal up the mouth of outrage for a while,
Till we can clear these ambiguities . . .

ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE coroner's court, Chumley Street, was like any other coroner's court. It dealt with such matters of vital, or rather of lethal, interest as suicide, murder, and sudden, inexplicable death. Newspapers reported its doings and quoted the dicta of its presiding genius, Mr. W. Wordsworth Scaife. Its findings from time to time sent bewildered, incredulous men and women to stand in yet another dingy room, to be questioned for their lives by gentlemen in black silk, and sentenced for their lives by gentlemen in scarlet cloth, all wigged, all awful. Yet the coroner's court of Chumley Street put on no airs, tricked itself out in no splendour, but went on, brown and airless and entirely undramatic, labelling tragedies and putting them out of the way.

There was always a reporter or two stationed at the Press table—grey persons whose work was not only dull but thankless. They lingered there day after day without hope of head-lines. They transcribed such events as pedestrian accidents ; and when a householder sought, candle in hand, for an escape of gas, they reported the result of his investigation.

But they never, save by the rarest good luck, were permitted so much as a sniff at sensation or crime. The moment a death occurred in interesting, that is to say, suspicious circumstances, they were shouldered out of their places by other persons, younger, more competent, who could deal with a story and had no scruples about stealing thunder. This expected, but none the less galling, fate was theirs on the June day when the coroner summoned his jury to consider those circumstances attending the death of London's first and only woman publisher.

Horrie Pedler's body lay in the mortuary close to the court, where it had been viewed by the coroner and jury as a matter of routine. The whole inquiry was a brisk affair, as devoid of drama as was its setting: one incident among hundreds on which the social position of the victim had for a moment turned a spotlight, but which demanded from the official in charge no more attention and no less than was accorded to the hundred other incidents.

Mr. W. W. Scaife was a pink and exact little man. He took his seat as the hour struck, put on glasses—a formality evidently, since he peered over them at the witnesses and under them at his notes—and, with the assistance of his officer, called the first witness—Ulysse le Mesurier.

"In the matter of the death of Horatia Pedler," said the coroner's officer to Ulysse, "you shall swear to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Yes," Ulysse agreed fervently, "I tell."

"Just give us the details, will you?" said the coroner, shaking his fountain-pen. "Tell it your own way."

"On Tuesday," said Ulysse, "I come as usual. I go first shopping—vegetables, food for the day. Always I go to the market for my vegetables. The shops, my God, they are dear to cheat!"

"Yes, yes," said the coroner, "and what time did you get to Vandeleur Street?"

"Time?" returned Ulysse. "They keep me at the market while I look for salad. Mademoiselle like very much salad with endive. Can I find endive that morning in the market? Lettuce, chicory—endive, no!"

"Look here," said the coroner, repenting of his injunction, "I think you'd better let me ask you questions. You can say yes or no."

Ulysse, after several false starts, was persuaded to accept this suggestion; and by slow degrees the facts of that morning were elicited.

He and his wife had arrived at eight-thirty as usual, letting themselves in at the front door with their key. They, with one or two charwomen who came in the evening to clean the offices, were the only servants. No one slept in the house with Miss Pedler. They went straight up in the lift to the flat at the top of the house and set about preparing breakfast, which was always brought to the sitting-room promptly at nine o'clock. By that time Miss Pedler had had her bath and was dressed. At a few minutes to nine he remarked to his wife that

it was strange they had not heard the bath running in. His wife answered that it would do Miss Pedler no harm to sleep late for once. He set the breakfast ready on its tray and gave it to his wife to take in, while he went down with a scuttle to bring up coal for his kitchen range. "Gas," said Ulysse in parenthesis, "he is no good to cook." The coal was kept in a shed opening into a tiny paved court at the back of the house. When he opened the door the first thing he saw——

Ulysse paused and made a helpless gesture with his hands.

"Yes," said the coroner, "very painful, I know: very shocking. But I am afraid you must describe what you saw."

"It is not death, monsieur!" Ulysse answered quickly. "I have seen enough of that —three years of war—but this—this was—mademoiselle——"

The little man was overcome.

The coroner coughed sympathetically, and with a glance at the jury. Allowances must, he implied, be made for the Gallic incapacity for self-control; but not, his second cough added, too many allowances.

"Now, Mr. le Mesurier," said the coroner, "if you're ready again——"

Ulysse pulled himself together.

He told very simply how he had found Horrie Pedler's body lying broken and twisted beside the dust-bins in the little court. Although he knew at once that she was dead he had tried to

lift her, to carry her into the house; but she was a big woman and her body was too heavy for him. He laid her down, disposing her decently, and ran in, meaning to telephone at once for the doctor. In the passage he met his wife, coming to tell him that the bed had not been slept in. He told her what had happened, and went at once to the telephone in the reception room, where he rang up the police. They said that they would bring their own doctor, and that he was not to touch the body until they came. But he had—oh, yes, he had already told them so—he had nothing to hide. He did not ring up Mr. Savory. Mr. Savory lived at Highgate and would already have left his house. He waited in the hall for the police, and till they arrived his wife stayed by her dead mistress.

"Very good!" said the coroner. "I think that's clear enough. Now we'll hear what your wife has to say."

Julie le Mesurier, his wife, told the same story. She described how she had entered the dead woman's bedroom that morning and found it undisturbed and neat, as she herself had left it the night before. Mademoiselle, Julie was sure, had not set foot in it again. One knew when mademoiselle had been in a room—papers, books on the floor, clothes lying about—but this room showed no such signs. She had waited with the body till the policemen came; then she had gone upstairs and set about her day's work to distract herself. There was the grate to clean, for example. While she was doing this

Mr. Savory came in with a policeman and spoke to her in French and asked her about the bag.

"What bag was that?" the coroner asked.

"Mademoiselle's evening bag, that they had found lying in the court."

"Very well," said the coroner. "Mr. Savory asked you about the bag. What next?"

"He picked up some of the burnt papers from the grate."

The coroner stared.

"That has nothing to do with my question. What did he ask you about the bag?"

He asked if it was mademoiselle's bag, and if she recognised the contents. She took it in her hands to make sure, and noticed the place where the latch-key ribbon had been torn away. She was astonished, and went at once to the drawer where bags and gloves were kept: and there she saw mademoiselle's evening latch-key with the torn ribbon still tied to it.

"Miss Pedler had two keys, then?"

Yes, she had. They were sewn on to ribbons. and then safety-pinned into whichever bag she was using at the time. One was in her day bag: the other Julie had found loose in the drawer.

"So that she could have had no key with her on the night of her death?"

No, and it was not the first time such a thing had happened. That was why the door leading into the flat from the roof was never locked—in case the key was forgotten. Oh, it had happened before—about six months ago, yes, so Miss Pedler had told Julie: she had gone up

the fire-escape one night. Julie had said that it was dangerous, and that mademoiselle should have someone sleeping in the house. Julie had warned her of burglars; but mademoiselle had no fear. She had said, "Catholics, I suppose, coming after my quartz rosary!" Poor mademoiselle! She laughed always. "After my rosary," she had said. "Well, if they do steal it they'll have to confess it——" Mademoiselle did not understand. . . .

"Yes, yes!" said the coroner. "Just let me make sure of this. Miss Pedler had on one occasion entered the flat by way of the fire-escape?"

"Yes, monsieur!"

"As a result of this the door leading on to the roof was not locked?"

"It was the order, monsieur!"

"On this occasion you are sure that both Miss Pedler's latch-keys were in the drawer?"

"I am sure, monsieur."

"Very well!" said the coroner. "That will do."

He looked at the jury as though asking what more they could want, and scanned his list of witnesses with a sigh for its length. There were the constables to be called yet, and the doctor, and the various witnesses to the state of mind of the deceased on the night of her death, who would probably be wordy. But policemen, at least, were not encouraged to be verbose. He called, one after the other, the two who had answered Ulysse's telephone message.

These constables furnished a plan of the back of the house showing the exact position of the fire-escape, an iron ladder leading down into the court where the body had been found. This court, in turn, was entered from a narrow passageway which divided the buildings in Vandeleur Street from the opposite houses in Dartford Street. The first constable went on to describe the body, which lay in the place, though not in the position, in which it had fallen, not directly beneath the fire-escape, but a little to one side, as though it had rebounded from the roof of the coal-shed. A black silk evening bag lay near by with a strip of silk torn away from the handle. The bag he afterwards took with its contents to Julie le Mesurier for identification. The officer drew a second plan which he handed to the coroner, who looked at it under his spectacles and gave a sharp nod of comprehension.

"About this fire-escape," said the coroner, "had it a hand-rail?"

"Only on the right-hand side," the constable answered.

"Was the ladder in good order?" the coroner asked.

It appeared that it was, save that one step near the top of the house was bent in. Did the constable assume that this bend, as he called it, was recent? No, the constable assumed nothing of the kind. He had noticed it, that was all. A fragment of black silk was caught on the bolt where the hand-rail joined the steps, which

matched the handle of the evening bag : and it looked as though this must have caught as the lady fell. He thought himself that it would be easy for her to miss her footing on that step in the dark. He believed that to have been the cause of the accident.

" Accident," said the coroner. " Well, we'll see what the doctor has to say about that."

The doctor said unhesitatingly that the cause of death was compound fracture of the right side of the skull. There was much laceration of the brain, which would be sufficient to cause instantaneous death. There were, besides, other extensive injuries to the right shoulder and chest. Were these injuries such as might be caused by a fall ? Certainly. In his opinion a fall had caused them.

" We'll have that first witness back again," the coroner decided. And when Ulysse re-appeared : " You heard what the constable said. Have you seen this bent step in the ladder ? "

" Often, monsieur ! "

" How long has it been there ? "

Ulysse could not remember. Some years, he thought : since the new plumbing had been put in, when there were workmen fixing pipes to the outer wall.

" You're sure it wasn't done that night ? "

Ulysse was sure. The step had been so for years.

" Now, another point. That door from the passage into the court, was it kept locked ? "

No, it was not. Coal arrived by that route, and tradesmen. It was not locked for the same reason that the door on the roof was not locked, by Miss Pedler's order.

The coroner peered at his notes.

" You've admitted to touching the body. Did you touch the bag ? "

Ulysse had not. Mr. Savory had picked it up and brought it in after the constables had carried in Miss Pedler. Mr. Savory had arrived just as this was happening, and while the doctor examined the body had asked him, Ulysse, where the body had been found. They had gone out with one of the constables to the courtyard and there picked up the bag. There were things scattered about that must have fallen from it—money and papers. He had helped Mr. Savory to pick them up and the constable made notes. No latch-key ? the coroner asked. So far as Ulysse knew, no latch-key.

" Thank you," said the coroner. " That's all I want from you. Call Mr. Savory ! "

Mr. Savory was called. Mr. Savory's eyes were sunk in his head, and he gave his answers with a brevity which showed that he resented the whole inquiry. His demeanour seemed to say that Horrie Pedler was dead, that the circumstances of her death must be evident to the meanest intelligence, and that this prying into her absurd little likeable personal ways was totally unnecessary. In the briefest possible manner he corroborated the cook's story. He had gone into the courtyard, seen

the bag, and gathered up the scattered money, a handkerchief, one or two letters. No latch-key.

He was questioned about Miss Pedler's state of mind on the previous evening. Was she cheerful? Mr. Savory thought so. When had he last seen her? At six o'clock, just before he left. They had discussed the production of a new book of Sir John Whittington's, settled the approximate date, and so on. Then he had said good night and told her to enjoy herself. She had answered that she wasn't much looking forward to her evening. Why not? She did not tell him. Did she seem worried? She had no reason as far as he knew. Would Mr. Savory answer the question, please? Did Miss Pedler seem worried? Not exactly. Had he any idea what she meant by that statement? No, no idea. They had better ask Mr. Poole. All in good time; certainly they would ask Mr. Poole. At present answers were required from witnesses, not suggestions. Would he kindly tell the coroner if Miss Pedler's business affairs were in order? Certainly they were in order. Mr. Savory, as her business manager, could assure the coroner of that. He was glad to answer any questions that came within his province. The coroner was obliged to him, and sniffed, and told him to stand down, looking over his glasses without approval as he did so.

But, before Mr. Savory could obey, a juror had intervened, an immense person, with the fixed, rounded eye of a cod on a slab. It was his first inquest, and he was a reader of sensational

journalism. So far, in this uninteresting case, there had been nothing on which such a reader might fasten, except one statement, a reference to papers. Papers, in this sense, always roused curiosity in the juryman. Papers, in his favourite journal, meant love-letters of a juicy kind or incriminating documents. The word held for him romance, such as other words—galleon, rapier, lost Atlantis—hold for other men. The opportunity was not to be missed. He rose.

"Mister," said the juryman, "what were they —the papers what you picked up out of the grate?"

"Nothing to do with all this," Savory answered briefly.

"That's for me to say," said the coroner, piqued, and taking the juryman's side. "Let us hear about them."

"It was nothing," Savory repeated. "One or two scraps of typescript."

"Why did you pick them up?"

"I thought I recognised them."

"And did you recognise them?"

"Two of the scraps, yes."

"What were they? Let us have the facts, please, without any more beating about the bush. What were these fragments?"

"Part of the manuscript of a book," Savory answered slowly.

"Of a book?"

"*Reflections*, by Marmion Poole."

There was a cry from the corner of the court where the witnesses were seated, Marmion Poole

was on his feet. Forgetful of the coroner, he called loudly to Savory:

"My book, Savory? My book? Good God, man, are you sure?"

"The cover label was legible still," Savory answered.

"Burnt? Both copies? And you've known it for two days! Why didn't you tell me? You ought to have told me!"

"We've had death in the Pack," Savory flung at him. "Did you know?"

The two men stared at each other, and Marmion breathed a "By God, Savory, you go far!"

But at this point the coroner, in considerable excitement, interrupted the interchange.

"I will not have this conversation," announced the coroner, angrily tapping the desk with his fountain-pen. "It is contemptuous and disorderly. I am putting questions to the witness, and nobody else except the jury has a right to do so. Sit down, sir!"—to Marmion: "You may make what inquiries you please afterwards. Now"—to Savory—"will you kindly tell us what possible connection these burnt papers can have with the death we are here to consider?"

"None, I should say," Savory answered unmoved. "I didn't raise the point."

"I should think," said the coroner acidly, "that manuscripts must pretty often meet casual fates in a big publishing house."

"You know very little about publishing houses," retorted Savory, "if you think so."

"Are you suggesting," said the coroner

nettled, " that these papers were burnt by someone who had no right to do so ? "

" Horrie Pedler wouldn't have done it," Savory maintained.

" Are you prepared to swear that she didn't do it ? " asked the coroner.

" Of course not ! " Savory answered.

" Was there any reason," the coroner persisted, " why Miss Pedler herself should not have burnt them ? "

" On the contrary," said Savory coolly, " there was every reason why she should."

" Reason ? " said the coroner.

" I gathered that the stuff was muck," said Savory deliberately, and looked straight at Marmion Poole as he said it. Marmion looked back as steadily, but made no movement. There was a tiny silence. Then the coroner, elevating his chin and eyeing the witness between his glances, said with finality :

" We are wasting time. I blame myself. I should not have permitted the digression. These papers can have, in my opinion, nothing to do with the circumstances of Miss Pedler's death. I think the jury will agree with me ? " The coroner ended on a rising note.

The jury shuffled and whispered. Finally the cod-like juryman stood up once more.

" What we want to know," said the juryman, hesitating, " is what the gentleman meant by ' muck ' ? "

" You needn't take that expression seriously," said the coroner.

"What we want to know," continued the juryman stolidly, "is, was there anything in them papers that somebody mightn't want to come out?"

"Are you suggesting," said the coroner, astonished, "that there may have been foul play?"

"No 'arm in asking," said the juryman. "We thought, as the gentleman they belonged to is 'ere——" He looked inquiringly in Marmion Poole's direction. The coroner looked too and sniffed. The juryman soothed him.

"You got to look at a thing like this all round," said the juryman. "That's what I say."

"As you like," said the coroner, resigned. "If you're not satisfied—— Anything more to ask this witness? Stand down there, sir, if you please," said the coroner testily, as though Savory were obstructing the court, "and let Mr. Poole come up. Mr. Poole? That's right. Swear the witness!"

Marmion Poole was sworn, and repeated the words of the oath in his attractive, precise voice, as though they were not a formula, but full, to him at least, of vivid meaning. Those watchers in court who knew his work, recognised here the quality that had made him a legend. He did not trouble to seek out new themes: he simply took old themes, and, by his own magic, made them new.

"Now, Mr. Poole," the coroner began, "you were summoned in the first place to give evidence

of Miss Pedler's state of mind. I will ask that question first therefore. Did she seem in good spirits when she dined with you on the night of her death?"

"May I give an account of that evening in my own way?" Marmion asked.

"Certainly," said the coroner. "I am sure there is no need to caution you about irrelevant matter."

Marmion acknowledged the courtesy with a slight bow and went on, frowning at the effort of concentration.

"Miss Pedler dined with me on the night of her death. You ask if she was in good spirits. As to that—no. Not at first. She was worried. Worried about this very book which"—he paused for a moment, biting his lip—"which it appears, has been destroyed. It was a book of personal reminiscence, very outspoken, even—it was her word—very indiscreet. That, I think, is what Mr. Savory meant by the epithet he chose. But I can assure you, sir, and the jury, that there was in these memoirs nothing that could justify any suspicion of foul play."

He paused. Said the coroner to the jury, like a mother imploring unruly children to behave:

"I think we may accept that assurance." Then, to Poole: "Yes. Go on with your account."

"Horrie Pedler," said Marmion, "was my old friend as well as my publisher. We had

not had a single difference since our association began twenty years ago. She had come that evening on purpose to remonstrate with me. She found this book of mine, these reflections, injudicious. She was a cautious woman: perhaps over-cautious. She was worried as to the wisdom of publishing my book, and worried also, I think, that I should take her hesitation amiss." He smiled a little sadly. "She need not have been. Of course she was right, and I accepted her criticism immediately, unhesitatingly. I could not do otherwise. Her judgment in literary matters was profound. I owe her more than I ever can repay. But she did not wholly trust her own astonishing instinct, and she knew that I am, sometimes, difficult as well as indiscreet."

"Just one thing more, Mr. Poole," said the coroner. "Did you part on good terms?"

"The best of terms. We talked till close on eleven. Then I took her out to her car. Before she got in we made an appointment to meet in a few days' time, when I should have reconsidered the matter on the lines she suggested. Those were her last words to me as she drove away."

For an instant the clear eyes seemed to be clouded. The coroner coughed.

"Thank you, Mr. Poole! Next witness, please! Mr. Lovell!"

Marmion Poole made way for Antony Lovell. The two men, meeting face to face, smiled; and Lovell laid a sympathetic hand for one

moment on Marmion's arm. Marmion thanked him in a murmur. They parted, and once more the questioning began.

Mr. Lovell was, so far as was known, the last person to see Horrie Pedler alive. She had arrived at his house at eleven and left at midnight. When she came to say good-bye he found that she had dismissed her chauffeur, and he had offered to get her a taxi or to escort her home. But she would have none of it.

"Stuff and nonsense, my dear Tony!" she had answered. He remembered her words perfectly. "If a woman of sixty-five can't walk a mile without being molested, it's a very strange thing. I want to clear my head. Now don't argue! Good night!"

With that she had stumped off down the street on her high evening heels and turned the corner in less than a minute. That was the last he saw of her. He could not forgive himself. He ought to have gone with her. But she had been so definite, and he had other guests to see to. Had she seemed cheerful? Very much so. At the top of her form. He had chaffed her about it.

"Thank you, Mr. Lovell!"

Mr. Lovell came last on Mr. Scaife's list of witnesses. The coroner ticked off the name, put his fountain-pen back in his breast-pocket, and, assembling his notes, told his jury exactly what to think of the evidence that had been put before them.

Here was a lady, of great ability, no doubt. Indeed, one of our foremost publishers, but careless as to details, as ladies often were. She was careless about her latch-key: it had to be pinned into her bag lest she should forget it; she frequently did forget it; on this occasion, the last night of her life, she forgot it. She went out, as they had heard, depressed; regained her spirits after an explanation with her friend; was last seen cheerful, or, as the witness expressed it, at the top of her form; and walked home alone. So much could be proved. Then, finding that her key was not in her bag, she did as she had done before, went to the tradesmen's entrance kept unlocked by her orders to meet this very emergency, and started to climb the one-railed fire-escape which led directly to the roof-garden of her flat. At some point, possibly at the step which bent inwards and on which she might easily have missed her footing in the dark, she slipped, fell, and fractured her skull, dying instantaneously. All this could not be proved; but it was probable. It was the one explanation which fitted the facts. As to the matter of the papers, he could see no connection between their burning and the cause of death, with which alone, he might remind them, their finding must be concerned. That incident might be matter for separate investigation if the persons involved chose. But there could be, to his mind, no question either as to the circumstances of the death or its cause. They would return

a verdict of "Death by Misadventure" in accordance with the evidence.

The jury did not argue. They did not leave the box. Whatever the romantic juror might think, they were there to agree with the coroner, and with the coroner they agreed. They returned the required verdict without a dissentient voice.

The coroner confirmed this decision, and immediately took off his glasses. Witnesses needed no other signal to disperse. The inquest was over.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN — "VIVE LA REINE!"

I do not fly ; but advantageous cares
Withdraw me from the odds of multitude.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

THE funeral was over ; but only just over, as could be seen by the litter of condolence cards, a lily snapped off short upon the carpet, and a belated wreath lying half in and half out of its box. Horrie's picture had been decorated by an un-English hand with a large crape bow ; but, except for the wreckage of floral sympathy and this one alien touch, Horrie Pedler's sitting-room, rich with summer sun, was as she had left it on the evening of her death. The quartz rosary of which Julie had spoken was upon a table, where lay a recent book with a paper-knife thrust between the pages to mark where Horrie's reading had ceased. The framed letter or two, the Thackeray drawing, the Sargent sketch—these hung in their places expectant ; and in silence Gilda, Marmion, Koko Fry, and Savory sat waiting while Mr. Trenny Rice, Horrie's solicitor, opened the envelope that contained her will. This last had no very legal appearance. It was, in fact, several sheets of notepaper covered with Horrie's sprawling handwriting. Mr. Rice seemed to feel that some kind of explanation was needed for this informal document, and some kind of reassurance.

"I may say," said Mr. Rice, "that this will was not drawn up by me: and does not follow the usual formula. Its purport, however," said Mr. Rice reluctantly, "is perfectly clear. Miss Pedler had no very great opinion of my profession. She often told me that lawyers made work for each other. She said that she was not going to have her wishes disregarded because of a comma or two in the wrong place. This explains," ended Mr. Rice, "the unconventional wording and form of the will."

His listeners nodded with some impatience, soon subdued to an expressionless calm. Mr. Trenny Rice delayed no longer than the few seconds that were used to polish his glasses, which done he began, with extreme deliberation, to read aloud from the paper in his hand.

"'This is my will and testament. I do not wish there to be any doubt about it. I know my own mind very clearly, and I have thought out this business of leaving my money with a good deal of care. Before I go on to the question of legacies there is one statement I want to make. It may seem strange to insist on a matter which will cease to concern me when I am dead; but it does now, in my lifetime, concern me greatly. Besides, the statement will, in a way, justify what follows. Here it is:

"'I am the first woman to build up, out of nothing, a publishing house in London, I have had no money backers; I have depended on

nobody for my policy; I have worked very hard and worked alone; and I have made something solid. This business, which now, as I write, is among the first three in England, has been a child to me. I have given the best of my strength to it. I want it to go on. And to go on, if possible, under the leadership of another woman.

"'For this reason I leave my publishing business with its good-will and all the money at present standing to the account of Pedlar's Pack, and all the moneys due at the time of my death, to Miss Gilda Bedenham, whom, for various reasons, I consider capable of taking my place. I make no conditions, for I do not think a gift should have a string tied to it. But I do ask her to consider a scheme which I have had in my mind for many months. If I live I will carry it out myself; if I die I know that I can trust her to see to it.'"

Mr. Rice looked up from his reading. The faces intent upon him were expressionless no longer. Gilda, incredulous, had half risen; almost she seemed about to protest; but in a moment sank down again and put her hands over her eyes, while softly, gracefully, Marmion Poole poured a sentence into the dead silence.

"*La reine est morte: vive la reine!*" said Marmion.

Savory frowned; and K. K. Fry's expression, as the phrase brought home to him the probable consequences of the bequest, changed from a half-smile that meant "Good old Horrie!"

to a twist of the lip that said, "So Gilda's rich now. No more walking about all night: no more meals off coffee-stalls: no more whitewash: perhaps even no more Mrs. Fry!" Then he heard her sob, and forgot everything except that he loved her and that she was in distress. Indeed he saw, as he came over to her anxiously, that dead Horrie was completing the change which the living Horrie had instigated. Horrie had packed him off to Jordan Street to work upon Gilda: and here, at last, was a Gilda much worked upon. She dropped her hands, useless now to hide the tears, and as a queen when told of her crown once childishly promised, "I will be good," so Gilda Bedenham, straightening her shoulders newly weighted with the Pedlar's Pack, said pitifully—"I will, I will be businesslike."

Mr. Rice cleared his throat with somewhat unnecessary emphasis and went on setting forth his dead client's further wishes.

"The scheme to which Miss Pedler refers is here," said he. "It is not embodied in the will. You may wish to consider it at leisure. Should you choose to adopt it——"

"Choose?" Gilda cried. "I'll do anything, anything she wants!"

"—I shall be glad to advise you," continued Mr. Rice, as though she had not spoken. "Now, as to the rest of the will: it goes on in these terms:

"'As this scheme makes provision for my business manager, Mr. James Hereward Savory,

and for my publicity manager, Mr. Kitchener Khartoum Fry——' "

Koko shuddered at this public exposure of his hidden shame, and Gilda's eye, meeting his, wavered to a smile.

" ' —I need not bring in their names, except to thank them for their loyalty and their devoted service. I do not think they will forget me ; but I should like them each to choose something from my personal belongings by way of remembrance.

" ' To my old friend, Marmion Poole, I leave the entire rights of every book that he has published with me. His name gave distinction to my first list ; and I am glad to express in this clumsy way the pride I have always felt in being his publisher. I should like him, too, to choose some memento.

" ' The money at present standing to my credit in the bank, together with various sums invested of which my solicitors have a record, I wish to divide as follows——' "

Mr. Trenny Rice read on monotonously. The list of legatees was long. Every person who had befriended Horrie, every person whom Horrie had befriended, was remembered. Gifts of money, of books, of pictures, of autographs, of recipes even—the bequests as they succeeded each other, showed that the will, which might have taken Horrie no more than an hour to scribble, had meant days of thought before it reached ink and paper. On went the voice of Mr. Rice, until his hearers ceased to heed him,

and busied themselves with their own thoughts, speculations, regrets : until a silence recalled them.

" That," said Mr. Rice, folding it, " is the will. There are other matters—valuations for probate and so on, which we need not discuss now. This envelope I will leave with you, Miss Bedenham. It contains the plan of which Miss Pedler speaks, and which you will want to go through with your other advisers. I need not add that I am entirely at your service at any time."

He rose from Horrie's little desk and shook hands with that decorum of solicitors which the laity find so overpowering. He pulled on his gloves with care, meticulously buttoned them, and took a faultless departure.

As Savory accompanied the solicitor downstairs Poole took up from the mantelpiece, where it was carelessly laid, an old mirror of burnished silver, and looked long in it, seeing there his own face, hardly older, surely not so greatly older, than when he had given the mirror to Horrie twenty years ago after the publication of the first book. To take back one's own gift, he thought whimsically, was hardly to incur fresh debt. This should be his memento, this disc of silver that recorded his own triumph and her faith in him.

Meanwhile Koko had drawn closer to Gilda and was addressing her with all the heartiness of which he felt capable.

" Good work ! " said Koko. " Great ! Just

the sort of job"—he swallowed and some memories went down—"just the sort of job I've always said you could do on your head."

Gilda turned to him, eyes brightened by her recent tears.

"Koko," said Gilda, "it's too awful. I want to feel grateful to Horrie; I am grateful; and I want to be sorry she's dead; and I do mean to work hard and try to remember things; but the only thing I can think of at the moment is your ridiculous name." She laughed weakly. "I, Kitchener Khartoum, take thee, Gilda——"

"I suppose it'll come to that one day," said K. K. Fry. "But it's a lot to ask of any woman. So Gilda—look here—I was just thinking——"

She saw his trouble, and soothed it.

"You're being noble," she said. "Young heiress and penniless journalist! Idiot! As if it made any difference. Oh, Koko, don't be absurd. Noble, with a name like that!"

She called to Marmion, deep still in his mirror, using, as always, the formal name.

"Mr. Poole, come here and deal with Koko!"

With a little start Marmion set the mirror down, strolled across to them, and put an arm through his daughter's. Thus linked they looked kindly on K. K. Fry. Their eyes, so different in colour, so like in setting, eyes of star sapphire and topaz, considered K. K. Fry, and found him, for all his short stature and tip-tilted nose, not uncomely.

"He'll do," said Marmion. "I like him."

"So do I," said Gilda.

"Much?" Marmion asked, with lifted eyebrows.

"No," Gilda answered, and smiled at Koko. "But he's a useful young man in a house."

"Really?" said Marmion, looking from one to the other. "In what way?"

"Whitewashing," Gilda answered. And it became evident to Koko that there was to be no difference. The future still held walks at midnight; still, perhaps, a coffee-stall or two; still, certainly and wonderfully, Mrs. Fry! But before he could say anything of his discovery she had turned abruptly from them both and walked to the window. There was a slight movement of her shoulders. Koko instinctively consulted with his eye the authority on feminine moods.

"Nothing," said Marmion, answering the glance. "Let her alone. She's happy."

The door opened to admit Savory, who halted and spoke to the figure at the window.

"I don't know if you'd like to go over this now, Miss Bedenham?" said Savory.

Gilda did not answer.

"If I may say so," Marmion suggested, "it would be more fair to let Miss Bedenham consider the papers first alone."

"I'm not going to bully her into doing anything she doesn't want," said Savory, "if that's what you mean."

His tone was not very civil, and Koko cut in swiftly:

"All this makes a bit of a mouthful for one morning. Say to-morrow!"

"Yes," said Gilda, turning. "To-morrow, Mr. Savory. To-day I just want to walk about somewhere and think."

"Kew?" suggested Marmion. "And may we come?"

"Perfect," said Gilda, and looked at K. K. Fry.

"Can't," said Koko, answering her look. "One of the world's workers, I am. People like me have made England what she is. Poor old trout!" he ended sentimentally.

At this, despite the unusual but not altogether unsuitable synonym for Britannia, Gilda's countenance fell.

"Perhaps," said Gilda, "it's not very businesslike of me——"

She looked ruefully at the papers in Savory's hands.

"I suppose," said Gilda, "I ought to start taking hold. I've got to begin sometime." Her gloves dropped unheeded.

"Just as you like," said Savory, restoring them. "It doesn't matter to us."

Gilda hesitated, and Marmion, watching her, began to murmur below his breath as they talked, lines from an old poem that he loved:

> "Bring hither the pink and purple columbine,
> With gillyflowers:
> Bring coronations——"

"No hurry," said Savory, "of course. It wouldn't take us long, though, to run through."

"—and sops-in-wine——"

Marmion crooned. "That's your flower, Koko. I see you at your wedding with a buttonhole of sops-in-wine."

"Only to-day," Gilda pleaded. "I can come to-morrow, early. But somehow when I'm in this mood things don't stick."

Her handkerchief escaped as she said it, from her half-opened bag.

"As you like," Savory repeated. And added, without amenity: "It's your show."

Gilda hesitated.

"—and cowslips and king-cups——"

Marmion's voice lured her——

"—and loved lilies,
The pretty panse,
And the chevisance——"

Suddenly Gilda Bedenham turned upon her betrothed husband and her manager with regal irritation.

"I know what you're all thinking," she cried. "If I don't start adding columns now—two minutes after I've had the biggest shock of my life—I'm shirking! It's not so. Mr. Poole's the only person who understands: except Horrie. Horrie would have understood. She wouldn't have said what you're all thinking. Of course I know what you're all thinking—emotion and business! Of course it doesn't do! That's why I'm going off by myself to-day. No, not even you, Koko, are to come with me! Flowers and peace and quiet, and myself

to myself, that's what I want. It's the last time in my life I shall have it. D'you think I don't realise that ? This is the job of a lifetime —and getting married on the top of it ! And, oh, I wish Horrie were here ! " cried Gilda. " She'd know how I feel."

She crammed the papers that the amazed Savory still held out to her into her gaping bag, found a safety-pin in its depths, pinned them securely to its lining, caught up her hat, jammed it on her fair, untidy head, whirled to the door, tripping on the mat as she did so, recovered her balance with considerable skill, and walked statelily out.

Savory lifted his eyebrows. Koko rubbed his hair awry, then started impulsively doorwards, and was checked by Marmion's smile.

" Let her go ! " said Marmion. " Don't you remember poor little Queen Victoria a hundred years ago—' Can I be alone for an hour ? ' I tell you, my boy, it's the beginning of a reign."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN — TRIAL BY NEWSPAPER

. . . the Grecians begin to proclaim barbarism, and policy grows to an ill opinion.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

AS usual, Marmion Poole was right.

Gilda Bedenham, when she appeared at Vandeleur Street next day, showed no signs of importing any further emotion whatever into business. Indeed, Koko Fry and James Savory, called into consultation, marvelled at her decisive calm. She had made all her plans, it appeared: humble plans, but clean cut. She would for the present install herself, more or less chaperoned by Ulysse and Julie, in Horrie Pedler's flat; but as far as the Pack was concerned, she proposed to be an apprentice. She would work under Savory's direction, confining herself at first to the simplicities of the business. There was no hurry. Government was not learnable in half an hour, said Gilda, but it was learnable. Savory was to rule; Marmion Poole was to adorn the Pack; as for Koko——

"That'll be all right, girl!" interjected that hero. "I'll talk me over with you later. I can wait——"

Gilda lifted her eyebrows.

"—my own time," he continued serenely. "You go and trample on Miss Gigg. She's taking it hard, I can tell you."

" It would be best if you're able to go through the letters with Miss Gigg, Miss Bedenham," said Savory. " I've drafted them, of course; but I'd like you to oversee—to go through them from the start. You'll find it the wisest way. It's all training."

She nodded, smiled, and went out.

Koko found it necessary, when he had opened the door for her, to hurry after her to explain the manipulation of the private lift.

Marmion, who, amazingly, had arrived at the grilling hour of ten to attend his first rehearsal for a directors' meeting, nodded approval.

" Protean creatures, women," said he. " I wonder which of those two will be Pedlar and which Pack in the end. What do you say? "

Savory, as usual, refused to say anything. He did not join in the great man's indulgent chucklery; and the great man, as usual, noted the omission.

" The funeral was yesterday," said Marmion softly, and watched the slow, indignant flush deepen on the manager's face before he added kindly: " So cheer up, my dear fellow! What are you brooding on? "

" I'm thinking of your book," said Savory abruptly.

" More ashes," said Marmion, sighing. " Let them lie! "

" That's all very well for you," Savory began.

" For me? " Marmion caught him up. " Two years of my work gone: twenty years of my life! "

"Yes. Why don't you make more fuss?" Savory demanded.

Marmion closed the door and came back into the room. He answered with dignity:

"The two copies that I gave Horrie were the only two in existence. I destroyed my rough stuff. I dislike litter. And I imagined that in Horrie's care my book would be safe."

The shaft went home. Marmion, observing the twitch of Savory's mouth, continued:

"You are sure that the ash you found in the grate represented both the English and American copies?"

"There was a lot of it," Savory muttered, "and we can't find any other trace of the manuscripts."

"It's gone, then," said Marmion, "irrevocably. I wonder what purpose a fuss, as you call it, would serve."

"None, from your point of view," Savory answered. "But I'm not thinking of you. I'm thinking of the firm. Your book's an asset——"

Marmion bowed.

"—that we can't afford to lose. It's a question for the insurance company, besides. I can't let the matter drop like that without investigation."

"My dear fellow," said Marmion, "you say that I study my own point of view; you say, too, very kindly, that my book is an asset; you also said in my hearing a day or two ago that this particular book was muck."

Savory did not dispute this statement. He waited.

"In one sense," Marmion went on quietly, "you were right. It was dangerous stuff. Horrie thought so; and that was the theme of our discussion. We had something approaching a very serious difference."

"You didn't say all this at the inquest," Savory challenged him.

"Naturally I didn't exaggerate our conversation. What need, since in the end I agreed with Horrie entirely? It is quite possible that when she reached home she burnt it. You yourself suggested, I remember, that there was every reason why she should."

"She didn't reach home," said Savory.

"Then before she dined with me; or that Julie burnt it by mistake. You remember the story of the Caxtons—how a whole chest full of priceless papers served day after day to light the fire?"

"Not probable," said Savory.

"Man, can't you see——" Marmion broke out: and checked himself. "But no. How should you? You're not a writer. Nor were you Horrie's friend. Oh, I know, I know"—he waved the objection aside—"you've been with her for years. She was good to you. You are grateful. But I've known her half my life; and as her friend I tell you this—you'll do no good by investigation. You may do incalculable harm. Suppose some genius connected the burning of the manuscript with her death.

Suppose it were pointed out that such a holocaust pointed to an unbalanced state of mind—do you want a suspicion of suicide to get about ? "

Savory made no answer. He stood perfectly still. Thinking with him meant no unconscious movement, no fidgeting : it meant concentration, a hidden process. Marmion, accustomed even in silences to display his own rare grace of gesture, studied this phenomenon with interest. For a while there was no sound in dead Horrie's room. Then footsteps approached on the stairs, approached at no measured pace, three steps at a time. Savory came out of his pondering like a diver emerging from deep water, and, as the steps slackened outside the door, said very deliberately :

" I'll think it over."

" That would be wise," said Marmion Poole lightly. " Do you want me any more ? Can I help ? I'm quite ready to take my duties seriously. A manuscript of genius to peruse ? No. Not even the Whittington manuscript ? That *Turn Again Whittington* in the checkboard cover ? Just as you like. Ah, Koko, you return as I go. Signify when next you care to dine with me, you and Gilda. Savory, I take my leave. Continue in virtue ! "

He departed, unhurried, unruffled, debonair.

" What's up ? " asked the re-entering Koko Fry of the frowning Savory. " Did you tackle him about the bonfire ? "

" I did," said Savory shortly.

" Well ? " Koko insisted.

"He won't have anything done," said Savory. "Well, the work's piling up."

And he, too, made for the door.

"He won't?" said Koko incredulously, following. "Why not?"

"Oh, plenty of reasons. All good."

"But I've started the stunt," Koko persisted, "the Press stunt. Haven't you seen the papers? They're all over it."

"All over what?"

"The burnt manuscript. How did it get burnt? Why did it get burnt? Was it hot stuff or wasn't it?"

"T.N.T.," said Savory.

"How many people are mentioned in it by name?"

"God knows! Hundreds!"

"There you are! Hundreds of people with an interest in destroying it. And what people!"

That excellent Press agent, Mr. K. K. Fry, made a rapturous clucking sound, thinking of the crowd of immensities and their revealed enormities.

Savory looked up at him.

"You mean you've read a riot act without his leave?"

Koko shrugged.

"Well—I like to say it's me," he admitted guiltily. "But you must know, Savory, this sort of thing doesn't need starting. It starts itself. It's big publicity. Even the *Drum*—— But haven't you seen the papers these last two days?"

Savory gloomed.

"I wasn't thinking of papers. I had the funeral to see to."

Koko searched his pockets and produced familiar paper rolls.

"Here—look at this—and this! And—wait!" He strode to the telephone. "That Miss Gigg? Send up yesterday's publicity, will you? Specially the *Trumpet* and the *Drum* and the *Evening Fife*. Oh, yes—and the *Jew's Harp* for yesterday and the day before. Look alive, will you?" He turned to the table. "The *Jew's Harp* stuff's sweet: full of little human touches about Poole shaving with a safety and getting up at four in the morning twice a week to buy flowers."

"Poole gets up at four in the morning, does he?" asked Savory.

"He's dippy about flowers: always goes to Covent Garden himself," Koko answered.

"Did he go to Covent Garden that Tuesday?"

"What Tuesday? How should I know?" Koko asked, taken aback.

"How far is Covent Garden from here?" Savory persisted.

"No distance. What's the idea?" said Koko, staring. "You don't mean to say you think Poole— Come to earth, Jim! Think again!"

"I made no statement," said Savory. "I asked a question, and you answered it."

And he turned aside to take the bundle of cuttings from Miss Gigg. It was a fat bundle, as Koko noted with pride: and at sight of it

his partner's odd questions faded from his mind. He watched while strip after strip was taken up, unrolled, tossed aside: and at last came out with a sudden:

"Well—Fairservice?"

For Savory, as he unrolled, read, and let fall, was humming between his teeth:

> "The kiln's on fire—the kiln's on fire—
> The kiln's on fire—she's a' in a lowe."

And then: "Had Poole read this," said Savory, "when he talked to me just now?"

"You bet he had," replied Koko without hesitation, and made a face which was not exactly a wink at Marmion Poole's expense.

"Poole hates publicity," said Koko, explaining, "in theory. It's dirt beneath his feet; and so are newspaper men. See one trying to get a word with him. It's like trying to have half an hour's chat with the pride of the harem. Then why a Press agent, you ask? To keep the others off, to protect him. I just drift there of a morning sometimes, and Poole walks up and down and lets me have his views on topics of the day; and by and by these leak out, and Poole's quite astonished. Still, I don't know," said Koko, suddenly grave, "that either of us meant the thing to go this far."

He picked up the *Fife's* comment, which was pitched fittingly in a high key. It was headed, "What's Wrong with Our Coroners?" and it demanded at the top of its voice an inquiry into

the finding of Mr. W. Wordsworth Scaife. "It must be evident," shrilled the *Fife*, "to the meanest intelligence, that the burning of the mysterious manuscript and the death of its publisher were in some way linked." It quoted Marmion Poole's own words at the inquest, describing the book as dangerous stuff; it said that the inquiry had been perfunctory and unsatisfying; it ended by saying that the public might well feel uneasy when events of this importance were passed over with little or no inquiry.

"They've got something to go on, come to think of it," said Koko. "Plenty of people who'd have liked that manuscript out of the way."

"I tell you, Koko, I hate all this mud-slinging," Savory answered irrelevantly. "The Pack's always kept free of dirt of any kind; and now Poole—— My God, and we've got to try and work in with him! Horrie must have been off her head."

"It's not Poole's fault," said Poole's protector. "He couldn't have foreseen this. D'you know what? He's had the Yard ringing up—unofficially, of course. Ruthven Traill's a personal friend."

"The Yard? Nobody's complained to the Yard, have they?"

"The papers have. The papers—— Where's the *Drum*? Look here!"

The *Drum* said gruffly that it did not care for sensation, nor did it take sides in literary

disputes. But it wished to point out, speaking generally and with no reference at all to the recent inquest on a distinguished woman citizen, that the police had of late been singularly unsuccessful in the field of criminal investigation. It mentioned a recent murder or two as yet unsolved, and laid great stress on the value of an early start in these matters. Newspapers, boomed the *Drum*, took upon themselves many thankless burdens. It would be intolerable if to these should be added the responsibility for indicating and tracking down crime. It rumbled off several sets of statistics, satisfactorily tracing a connection between the raising of police salaries and the lowering of their quota of captures, and ended with a loud boom in the very ear of the Home Secretary.

Savory finished reading the cutting and flicked it aside.

"That wouldn't touch Traill," said he. "I know Traill. Newspaper hysterics couldn't rattle him."

"Couldn't they?" inquired Koko sharply, assailed in his dignity as a member of the fourth estate. "I tell you, when you get the whole Press howling, things start getting a move on —even the Yard. D'you know what Traill rang up for? He wanted a full list of all the people Poole had mentioned in *Reflections*."

"What?" demanded the incredulous Savory.

"He did. And Poole gave it to him, what's more. Not for publication, of course. Traill was at him for half an hour on the phone. Poole

didn't see why his privacy should be thus invaded and all the rest of it! He was grand. Traill wasn't the first, of course. The papers have been at him for days. He met the *Trumpet* man sitting on his doorstep one morning at five-thirty—my fault! I'd spread that Covent Garden stuff pretty thick. It must have been a lovely interview—a pouring wet morning and Poole in a blistering rage. And Grady—I know the *Trumpet* man—Grady starting to gibber in Erse. The net result ought to be somewhere here."

He sought amid the strips and produced one on a pinkish paper.

"This is the one. They say Poole's impeding the cause of justice. Oh, it's on the quiet, of course. It's a letter signed J. Vesey MacGilly-cuddy. I used to do letters myself once: only I was Audax ad Astra. Listen to Grady!

"'Sir, I understand from a small paragraph in yesterday's issue of your valuable paper, that Mr. Poole refuses to throw any light on the matter which is just now exercising the minds of the public'—glad to hear it: their minds need a bit of exercise—'of the public by communicating further details of his destroyed manuscript and the tragedy which, it is alleged, these reminiscences precipitated.' Great, isn't it? D'you notice the word 'allege'? Worth thousands a year, that word is, warding off libel actions. However, to resume—— 'Loyalty is a quality to be respected; but it must give way before wider issues. Mr. Poole may earn his

fellow citizens' gratitude or derision according as he gives his information or withholds it.' I call that neat."

"I call it a damned scandal," said Savory hotly.

"You wanted it looked into yourself," Koko reminded him.

"Privately. For our own satisfaction. Not all this notoriety and cheapjack sensation."

"Sensation, do you call it?" asked Koko. "Why, the sensation hasn't started yet. Poole's annoyed some of them, and trodden on the others' toes. They won't let him alone, don't you think it! He won't give them an answer! He won't call in the police! Then just you wait. Why, there are half a dozen more stunts they can try yet! How about going round the old-stagers? All the guests at that last luncheon? Poole won't give names, won't he? He'll call them names, will he? You wait!"

Fortunately for Mr. Savory's patience he had not to wait long. The next day was Sunday, and Mr. Savory, tempted by the fine morning, strolled out early along the empty ways of Highgate to buy a paper which should accompany his breakfast. His usual choice was the *Bassoon*, with its inconspicuous but weighty résumés of the week's work and play. But approaching the corner where its vendor stood, his eye was caught by the staring purple letters which were the advertising medium chosen by the *Piccolo*. The phrase which arrested his eye was—POOLE'S BLACK LIST!

Mr. Savory, to the surprise and delight of the vendor, to whom this journal was as Moses and the prophets, bought a copy of the *Piccolo* and read it at once, standing in the street, while a film stole over the milk for his coffee and his toast turned to leather. The *Piccolo* offered a whole column, enjoyable, fruity, and gently salacious. Startling developments, said the *Piccolo*, had not been long delayed in the matter of the Poole memoirs, which were destroyed in mysterious circumstances on the night of June second. It went on to give glimpses of Marmion Poole's past, glimpses of Eliza Point's past, of Canaletta Fauve's, of Mrs. Fenwick Sprowle's, glimpses of the past, indeed, of every person who had attended the luncheon at the Pedlar's Pack. All these, said the *Piccolo*, could throw light on the subject, and if properly approached might willingly do so. It ended by declaring with a smirk that Mr. Poole's well-known and numerous friendships lent piquancy to what might possibly prove a sinister tragedy. And the reader was left with the impression that if he clamoured, and read the *Piccolo* and its satellite group of dailies with sufficient fervour, if, in fact, he were good, the *Piccolo*, in spite of the deplorably dull verdict, would eventually find him a beautiful bloody murder complete with sex appeal.

Mr. Savory tore out this column and, dropping into the gutter the remainder of the journal, walked slowly home to his attendant breakfast.

He was greeted next morning on his arrival at the office by Miss Gigg, twittering.

"Lady Fussell's rung up," she announced. "And there's two or three of the others asked for appointments——"

"What others?" Mr. Savory asked in no encouraging tone.

"That were at the lunch," Miss Gigg replied. "Sir John Vetch, and Madame Fauve, and Miss Pringle again. I made a list. Madame Fauve was ever so upset, but I understood her all right. I've got all the 'French by Phone' records now," ended Miss Gigg triumphantly.

"I won't see anyone," said Mr. Savory, "except on business. I've got no time to waste if they have. Put them on to Mr. Fry."

"Mr. Fry's not come yet," said Miss Gigg. "Besides, they all seem to think it was you, if you'll excuse my saying so."

"Think what was me?" Savory asked impatiently.

"That gave that list to the papers," said Miss Gigg, with the eye of one who sets match to firework. But no explosion followed.

"Mr. Fry will see to it," said Mr. Savory briefly, and turned to the mounting papers on his desk. These absorbed his attention until eleven-fifteen, at which hour K. K. Fry, widely grinning, entered the room.

"There you are!" said Savory rising. "I want to talk to you, Koko. Have these papers all gone mad?"

"Pretty near," Mr. Fry replied proudly. "Have they been ringing up? I thought we'd have a few calls put through this morning."

"Pity you didn't stay, then," said Savory, "and attend to them."

"Pity!" repeated K. K. Fry. "No, James, there you're wrong. I've been with Poole."

"I wish somebody'd take Poole out and shoot him," said Savory. "Causing all this rumpus!"

"Don't you run down Poole," said K. K. Fry. "He's a great man."

Savory turned on him.

"You're his Press agent, I know, Koko; but you needn't carry it into private life."

"Listen to me," said K. K. Fry impressively. "I went there this morning—drifted in the way I do—and there was Poole playing with his flowers. I asked him if he'd seen the *Piccolo*. He said no: so I told him about the list. He thought for a bit, and gave one of the roses half an aspirin, and then he asked me what I thought ought to be done. I said straight out that if he'd given the papers a civil answer in the first place they'd have let him alone. I said if they were on the ramp it was because he'd goaded them up to it. Well, at that he gave me a funny look, just like a kid of ten; and then, of course, I saw."

"Saw what?"

"What he's been playing for. Publicity! You can't teach Poole anything about publicity. He's been getting them curiouser and curiouser like Alice, until now he's only got to snore and it's news. And you say he's not a great man! I wish a few of my other authors had his dash. You could do with some of it yourself."

"Thanks," said Savory, "I don't share your admiration. What you say comes simply to this—he's making capital for himself out of Horrie's death."

"Be fair, Jim!" said Koko quickly. "Poole's not that sort. He refused to talk to the papers in the first place because he thought the thing would die down. He couldn't have foreseen all this. If it's anybody's fault it's mine. I thought it was safe. Literature—they don't care two hoots for literature as a rule. It's all this confounded mystery that's done the trick. Why, poor Horrie couldn't——"

A tap at the door cut the thread of his monologue, and Gilda entered. It was early yet, but already her hair was astray; and its disorder emphasised curiously the precision of her speech. Her greeting was brief and to the purpose.

"Good morning," said she. "You, Koko—I'm glad you're here. I was looking for you. I want you to do something for me. This newspaper campaign"—her voice was the voice of Horrie Pedler's successor—"I want it stopped."

Koko whistled unhappily.

"You don't ask much, madam," said he. "Ever seen a man try to stop an avalanche?"

But Gilda was in no mood for irony.

"I know," said she, waving protest aside. "It won't be easy. It's got out of control, but we can't, in decency, let it go on."

"But we're on the very crest of the thing now," Koko protested. "If I try to interfere

they'll just flatten me out. It's a Press agent's business to keep the ball rolling, not to put his spoke in."

"But it's not a question of business any more," said Gilda, distressed. "It's a question of decent feeling and—and how one behaves. I don't quite know how to put it——"

She made a little gesture that called for their understanding and approval. Savory answered it.

"I agree, Miss Bedenham," said he, suddenly breaking silence. "I agree with you entirely. We're as sick as you are. The Pack can do without that kind of advertisement."

He looked at her, and at Koko, standing, pulling at his lower lip, then picked up a random handful of letters from his desk and made for the door with a: "Will you excuse me one moment?"

This tactful exit, which annoyed Koko, was accepted by Gilda with the usual feminine gratitude for opportunity.

"Koko——" she said, and came toward but did not touch him; for these were business hours. "Koko, you do see, don't you?"

"I see what you want," he answered. "What I don't see is how to do it."

"No," said she, searching his eyes. "It isn't that. You think I'm being sentimental, don't you? You're trying to tell me that one can't always have kid gloves on. I know, but—— Oh, Koko, it's Horrie—Horrie and my own father—— I must at least try to make an end of it. If you won't help me——"

"Gilda!" cried Koko, hurt. You know I'd walk into the river for you: you know I'd do any darn thing in the world you want——"

But she shook her head.

"No, not like that," said she. "I don't want it like that. I don't want to use your feeling for me to make you do it. I want you to feel it yourself—that it's the only thing to be done."

She came nearer and caught the breast of his coat.

"Do you remember my saying once that bright blue wasn't your colour? I didn't only mean clothes. I meant all sorts of things that don't suit you, that you're too fine for. You are fine," said Gilda proudly, "or I wouldn't be going to marry you. And all this—it's unworthy."

She shook him gently.

"See it, Koko!" she implored. "See it! See it, my dear!"

Very gently, blinking a little, he took her hands.

"I see all right," said he, and kissed them.

Thus it came about that when, three days later, he drifted within the orbit of Marmion Poole, his attitude was wary, different, a trifle nervous, had Marmion been in a mood to observe. But on this particular morning Marmion was himself a prey to many fine confused feelings, and did not notice his satellite's altered manner. They talked for a while on such matters of interest as white raspberries and the more recent

revelations of Einstein ; then, on a plaintive note, Marmion voiced his preoccupation.

" Koko," said he, " Koko, I've been considering. Have you any recollection of our last talk ? I believe," said Marmion diffidently, " it was concerned with this newspaper outcry that is so distressing me."

" And others," rejoined K. K. Fry. " We get ladies every day coming to the office in tears, offering alibis with both hands."

" Exactly," nodded Marmion Poole. " And that confirms me in an appalling suspicion."

" Suspicion ? " asked Koko, at once alert.

" One that assails me rarely. The suspicion that I have not been entirely blameless, unassailably right in my dealings with the newspapers."

K. K. Fry did not answer. He knew better than to answer. He knew that he was only tolerated in Marmion Poole's drawing-room as a listener and interpreter of the half-unveiled mood. He kept silent as Marmion strolled hither and yon among his flowers.

" It seemed to me," said Marmion presently, " the only course. This insulting pursuit of me, this lying in wait, this telephoning, this persecution—to these there could only be one answer, one dignified response—silence."

Koko began to brace himself mentally, to wonder if this were the moment.

" But this silence of mine," Marmion went on, " has spoken with tongues. It has had an effect entirely opposed to that which I intended. I have been long absent from London ; I have

perhaps lost touch with the Press—not that I regret it: touch is not a thing to be regretted where pitch is concerned. But in my main purpose, my only purpose, which was to keep Horrie from them—there I have failed."

He halted, considered a moment, set back his shoulders.

"Now I will do what I can. I will give them their answer." Up went his chin. "I dismount from my high horse at last; it has carried me into a quagmire. Bad riding, you will say. Perhaps. But Pegasus has spoiled me for other mounts."

"You give me a free hand, then?" asked K. K. Fry slowly.

"A free hand," echoed smiling Marmion.

"Then, sir," said Koko, suddenly resolved, "I say, drop it!"

Marmion, astounded, faced him.

"Drop it!" Koko repeated doggedly. "That's my advice. They've had their run, the papers. If you keep quiet it'll die down. An interview with you now would be like kicking a smouldering fire. The whole thing'll flare up and we'll have it all over again, only worse."

"A new attitude," said Marmion, puzzled. "A new attitude, Koko."

"I'm talking straight now, sir," said Koko. "But even as a publicity stunt it won't do. There's such a thing as over-advertising. Besides, if you do give an interview, what could you say? You don't think, do you, that there's

anything in this idea that Horrie was murdered? "

"Perhaps," said Marmion very gravely. "But I will not speculate, at any rate in public. Any theory I may have formed I keep for my private notebooks."

"Notebooks?" asked Koko, the old Adam in him reviving. Then, instantly repentant of backsliding: "That's settled, anyhow. I'll tell them hands off. No more. Finish."

"You really think I should be wise?" questioned Marmion with docility.

"Well," Koko answered, "it seems to me, a man in your position—publicity's no good to him. He's got beyond it. And it's no good to the duds. They can't live up to it. You can't fool all the people all the time."

He snapped the elastic band about his notebook and stowed it away in a vest pocket. Marmion, his lips twitching, regarded this gesture of finality, and at last was moved to question.

"Koko," said he, "relieve my mind. Am I, as I imagine, in the presence of a reformed character?"

Confidence and dignity deserted Koko at this unexpected assault. He balanced on one foot and rubbed its ankle with the other, an attitude he had abandoned at the age of eight.

"I don't quite get you, Mr. Poole," said he, uneasy beneath that bright and mocking eye.

"May one ask," continued Marmion smoothly,

" if this change in your views on publicity is entirely spontaneous ? "

" Thinking of chucking publicity," Koko mumbled. " Thinking of pushing a typewriter." Elegance of diction had forsaken him now.

" Indeed ? " Marmion raised his eyebrows. " Writing ? "

" Fact ! " said Koko : and lent colour to the monosyllable by changing his balance to the other foot before he looked defiantly at Marmion Poole. But the eyes that met his were so gay, so gently mocking, that against his will he began lopsidedly to grin ; at which Marmion Poole flung back his head and laughed, and continued to laugh, and laughed at his own laughter until the mocking eyes grew misty. The reluctant Koko, caught up into his mood, in turn gave way without heel-taps. At last Marmion resumed gravity and spoke.

" Koko," said he, " you make a habit of telling me I'm a great man. I can't say I go that far with you ; but I'll own this—my daughter, at any rate, is a great woman ! "

" With you ! " said Koko, recovering. " With you all the way ! "

Marmion Poole held out his hand.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"AMOR OMNIBUS IDEM"

IAGO: *She gives it out that you shall marry her: Do you intend it?*
CASSIO: *Ha, ha, ha!* OTHELLO.

"LOOK here," said K. K. Fry, as he struggled up the curving narrow steps in Gilda's wake, and lurched to a seat beside her, "what do you mean by it, girl? We might have run to a taxi, I should think, without filing our petition."

"Rather soon, isn't it, to begin talking of filing petitions?" Gilda inquired.

"Bankruptcy, silly! This—this is undignified."

The bus swung round a corner apparently on two wheels, and Mr. Fry to save himself laid an impetuous hand on the knee of the stout lady opposite, who, suspecting designs upon her string bag bulging with spring onions and an oxtail, sharply slapped him.

"'Ere, young man," said the affronted lady, "'oo do you think you're tickling?"

"Haven't a notion, madam," rejoined K. K. Fry politely.

"Then don't you make ser free," snapped the lady, and moved the temptation, onions, oxtail, and all, out of his reach.

"Where were we?" inquired K. K. Fry, resuming his conversation with Gilda.

"Just past Sloane Square," she answered meekly.

"Saying, silly!" K. K. Fry shouted, as the bus, with a grinding of gears, changed its mind about running over a policeman.

"Something about bankruptcy," said Gilda coolly. "Don't let's go back to it. There are plenty of other things to talk about."

"Us, you mean?" suggested K. K. Fry.

"We've gone over that topic twice already to-day," Gilda rebuked him.

"Well," said he, rebelliously, "I can think of lots more to say."

"For instance?" Gilda asked wickedly.

"Well," said K. K. Fry, after a period of consideration, "we seem to get on all right, don't we? We haven't thrown things at each other yet. It's pretty wonderful, come to think of it," he went on. "Here we are, and it's raining, and there's not enough room on the seat, but do we care?"

"No," said Gilda, faithful to her cue.

"Here we are," continued K. K. Fry lyrically, "—none of the average silly nonsense about us. We go off on our own and settle things our own way. Nobody interferes with us. Nothing's expected of us——"

"Fares, please!" said a harsh voice; and a hand appeared at K. K. Fry's shoulder, clinking a hoard of pennies in its uninviting palm.

"Fares?" repeated K. K. Fry, returning to earth and beginning to fumble in his pocket. "Where to?"

"They didn't learn me mind-reading at school," replied the voice, and repeated with increased asperity, "Fares, please!"

"Where are we going?" said K. K. Fry, still fumbling, to Gilda.

"Anywhere," she answered absently, gazing down into the street.

"Where do you go to?" K. K. Fry desperately inquired of the voice.

"'Alf London," replied the voice laconically.

"Well," said K. K. Fry, fumbling still, and evading the eye, rounded with suspicion, of the lady with the string bag, "say Marble Arch."

"Not that 'alf," said the voice wearily. "Piccadilly Circus, Shaftesbury Avenue, Cambridge Circus, New Oxford Street, 'Igh 'Olborn, Mansion 'Ouse——"

"Piccadilly Circus," said K. K. Fry, selecting one from this assortment of destinations.

"Fourpence," said the voice to the accompaniment of two pings.

A pair of blue tickets were added to the coppers in the hand. K. K. Fry, having tried all his pockets in turn, now ceased to fumble.

"Gilda," said he, but without much hope, "have you got any money on you?"

"No, dear," she vaguely replied. "I don't think so, I hardly ever have."

"Do have a look," urged K. K. Fry, "because I gave that fellow just now my last seven and sixpence."

"Seven and sixpence?" Gilda repeated, interested at last. "Is that all it costs?"

"Same as a dog licence," he confirmed, nodding. "Where's your bag?"

She gave it to him, and K. K. Fry produced from its depths a folded document, several bus tickets, three pencils, a powder-puff, two clean handkerchiefs, and a latch-key, the conductor and the lady with the bag looking on meanwhile with the sardonic tolerance of a sophisticated audience watching the first performance of an amateur conjurer. There was no money of any kind in the bag.

"I was afraid so," said Gilda tranquilly. "You'd better give him the address."

For sole comment on this suggestion the uninviting hand struck heavily on a bell.

"Get orf!" said the voice.

"But look here," pleaded K. K. Fry, "I must have something somewhere."

He renewed his fumbling and the voice its refrain.

"Get orf!" it said.

"Come on," said Gilda to Koko, rising without haste. "Quickly! Put all those things back. So sorry!" she apologised to the voice, and went past it down the swaying stairs.

K. K. Fry stuffing the impedimenta of his conjuring tricks back in their receptacle, came on, madly lifting his hat to the lady with the string bag, and descended the stairs without grace. With a snort the bus shed them and continued on its way.

"Sickening," said K. K. Fry, still slapping unlikely pockets.

"Do we care?" asked Gilda dreamily.

"No," replied K. K. Fry, faithful to his cue.

They began to walk in some direction or other: beside them buses thundered, taxis lingered, sparrows darted, flower-sellers called: all glamorous, all spangled with rain. They walked; a policeman's arm barred their way; they halted and stood silent.

"'Ere!" said a familiar voice, and a familiar hand appeared at Koko's elbow. It still held in its uninviting palm its pristine hoard of coppers. But the fingers now were closed upon an oblong document.

"'Ere!" the voice repeated. "You dropped this, mister!"

"Oh," said K. K. Fry, blankly accepting the document. "Oh, did I?"

"You did," said the voice, and added, from the intricacies of a throaty chuckle: "Many 'appy returns."

Hand and voice were withdrawn. The arm of the policeman dropped. A wave of pedestrians surged about them and bore them on.

"Goodness!" said Gilda with calm, replacing in her bag the document, which was headed, "Registrar of Marriages: Borough of Chelsea." "Seven and sixpence! Think if we'd lost it!"

"Worth the money," said K. K. Fry, "worth it, every penny!"

He tucked her hand in the crook of his arm, and they continued to walk on through the rain in some direction or other.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN — THE "JEW'S HARP"

There are a kind of men so loose of soul,
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs.

OTHELLO.

K. K. FRY did not often abuse the permission granted by his wife to read newspapers at breakfast; but it is a fact that on a certain morning less than a week after their marriage he neglected his excellent coffee, forgot to pass the marmalade, and withdrew for a good ten minutes behind the widespread pages of the *Jew's Harp*. For a while his wife respected his absorption, but eventually it tantalised her. She rose and, passing behind him, put a hand deliberately over his eyes.

"Hullo! What?" inquired K. K. Fry, emerging from his preoccupation with a jerk.

"Drink up your coffee, dear!" replied his wife, "and wipe the egg off your mouth. That's better! Is there any news in the *Harp*?"

She took the paper from him in her vague yet purposeful way and turned to the page which had so chained his attention. Mr. Fry swiftly drank his coffee, wiped his mouth perfunctorily, and stood up, pulling down his well-cut waistcoat.

"I'm off," said he. "I'll catch him at breakfast if I hurry."

"Catch who, dear?" Gilda asked, her eyes

straying still over the pages in search of that which had caused K. K. Fry to scamp his breakfast.

"Haven't you got it yet?" said he, halting. "Here! Look at it! What's he up to? When will he learn to leave his publicity to me? Day of the amateur! Amateur publicity's rotten publicity! Not there, silly—top right-hand corner."

Gilda's eye, thus directed, found a column headed "Poole's Challenge," and read:

"Are our police up to date? This is a question which Mr. Marmion Poole, whom I found arranging flowers in his sanctum, thinks should be answered in the negative. 'They don't read enough,' said Mr. Poole. 'They lack outlook, and the public begins to realise it. The present-day thriller, for instance; in how many cases is the hero a Scotland Yard man? It is the day of the amateur, in detection as in all other walks of life.'"

"And I don't suppose," said Gilda, amused, "that he's ever read a thriller."

"I don't mind that," returned K. K. Fry. "We all have to put up a bluff sometimes. It's the vanity of the man——"

"Vanity?" Gilda caught him up.

"I don't mean mere swelled head, of course," said Koko. "He's too big a man for that. He's a genius, Poole! That's why you'd think all this would be less than the dust to him. But it isn't so. I've watched him. I know him. The great need of his life's an audience—any audience—even this."

Gilda followed his glance, that rested without reverence upon the tumbled sheets of the *Jew's Harp*.

"Perhaps," she said slowly. "Koko, I wonder if that's why he seems so lost without Horrie."

"Of course it is," Koko confirmed. "And since he can't have Horrie he'll tell the world. If she were alive, do you think he'd have touched this kind of publicity? There'd have been no need. She soothed his vanity, kept it under."

"I suppose," said Gilda, "I ought to have taken on Horrie's job there as well."

"You couldn't," Koko answered seriously. "Not with me in the picture. Poole doesn't like going shares."

"No," she said, and was silent. She knew that this was the truth. Then, out of her new-won understanding of authors—"But, Koko, they're all like that—all vain—all prickly. It's part of the make-up."

Koko shook his head.

"It's more than vanity with Poole," said he. "It's——"

He did not say what it was. Next moment his eye, which still rested on the offending interview, re-read an infuriating sentence, and he snorted.

"Amateur!" ejaculated K. K. Fry. "Poole, that wouldn't talk to Scotland Yard! Poole, that threw the *Trumpet* man out on his ear! Let me at him! Go on! Unhand me!"

Gilda released the sleeve that she held and walked with him to the door.

"Be kind to him," said she.

"Not much!" returned the ferocious Koko. "I'm going to slay him. Back for lunch."

He departed in haste; and his wife sat down at leisure to finish the article and to examine more particularly the paragraph which had roused K. K. Fry's indignation. After further unsympathetic reference to the police, Marmion Poole went on:

"I am willing, as the racing men have it, to back my fancy, my solitary fancy, against their organisation and their prestige, such as it is. I have a theory of my manuscript's destruction which I have committed to paper in the form of a short story. This I have deposited in a safe place; and now I make my challenge. The instant the criminal or the truth of the affair is discovered, I shall make my story public. I shall present it, free, to the first editor who chooses to claim it. I care little for money, much for truth."

The reporter, not unnaturally, had then asked Mr. Poole why he did not publish at once and give the police a lead. To which Mr. Poole had answered magnificently that he was a writer, not a tipstaff. And the interview closed with the reporter's comment that here was proof, if proof were needed, of the growing popularity of the thriller in highbrow circles.

Gilda read to the end, laughed, and went

about her duties. Meanwhile her husband, hastening across London in a taxi, was engaged in the preparation of pickled rods for her father. He was really angry; and when at last he arrived, and was announced by Elwes, his manner lacked deference.

"Look here, sir," said Koko, "tell me this! Am I running you or am I not?"

Marmion Poole looked lazily up at K. K. Fry from his tidy desk, on which newspaper clippings lay in neat bundles.

"Enter, Koko," said he, "and unbonnet!"

K. K. Fry flung his offending hat upon a chair, and continued:

"Because, if I am, there are one or two things I've got to know. You're a poet and all that, and you're news, I grant you. All the more reason to put a value on yourself. This *Harp* business—it's wicked. It's bringing the whole show down to street level. You told me to let it all drop—so what the hell, if I may say so," went on the enraged but filial Koko, "do you mean by it?"

Marmion, thus attacked, displayed no resentment. He pushed cigarettes toward Koko, and, leaning back in his chair, smiled at the vehement young man.

"I thought it would interest you," he said.

"Interest?" returned Koko, launching the word with the vigour of a Shylock. "I'm not interested. I'm sick. Here I go, day after day, planting pars about you in spots where they'll blossom, and then, without a word, you

cast this whole fat lot away on the *Harp*—the *Harp*!" repeated Koko. "Why not the *Police Gazette*?"

"My dear Koko," said Marmion, a little ruefully, "I'm afraid I do owe you an apology. I ought to have consulted you."

"It was wicked," persisted the scandalised Koko. "And I've got to make you see it. This sort of thing isn't your line, sir. When a man gets to be news," said Koko, explaining, "the label's half the battle, as it is with whisky or meat extract. You've got to fix the label and stick to it, and choose your public and stick to it. You've got to be exclusive. This public's no good to you. Do you suppose any one of the *Harp's* million subscribers has ever read a line of yours, or ever will?"

He surveyed his unofficial father-in-law with severity, and continued:

"Remember what Horrie said that day at lunch? Well, she was right. Horrie always was right. I don't mind telling you she taught me all"—he paused, and in honesty added—"anyhow, half what I know of publicity. You and I are babes compared to her. She knew a lot, did Horrie."

"Admitted," said Marmion. "Admitted, my dear Koko. It was a woman's brain; that is to say, in one respect, the brain of an artist: it leaped to conclusions; it did not come at them by logic. She could have understood"—he tapped the cutting—"this *tour de force* of mine."

"She wouldn't have understood giving a thing like that to the *Harp*," muttered Koko.

"Yes, she could appreciate achievement," Marmion went on softly. "That strange leaping mind—it could not lead, but it could follow: nobly, unfalteringly follow. The eagerness, the pride one saw sometimes in her eyes! I miss Horrie," said Marmion wistfully, and the crow's-feet about his eyes seemed shocking, as on the face of a child.

"I know," said Koko uncomfortably. Then, seeking refuge in briskness—"And I know what she'd have thought of this stunt of yours. What's the sense of it? They'll never find out. Why waste a story?"

"It amused me," said Marmion. "It amused me to set them the puzzle. And this was the only paper that did not plague me."

"But there's nothing to go on," Koko expostulated.

"You think not?" Marmion asked, rising. "I don't agree with you."

He put out a forefinger and caressed the smooth petal of a rose, as though it had been the cheek of a tiny child.

"I don't agree with you, friend Koko," he repeated. "It was, I admit, the perfect crime, the crime without clumsiness, without clues, the crime of a master. For all that, possibly because of that, I see the process."

"Crime?" said Koko Fry, staring. "You do think there's something in it then?"

"Certainly," Marmion answered. "And,

while I have a great respect for the criminal, I have also some pity for him. An artist without an audience is no more than half an artist."

"Do you know who it was?" Koko asked bluntly.

"Yes," Marmion answered. "I think I may say so."

"Proofs?" Koko insisted.

Marmion waved the word aside.

"None," said he. "I tell you, the man, in his own line, was an artist. Though he destroyed my work, as a fellow-artist I appreciate and pity him—and guess at his reasons."

Still caressing the rose, he looked at Koko.

"Gilda tells me—indeed, you yourself once hinted—that you propose to join our ranks, that you are trying to write in your own way. Let me give you a curtain lecture, with the craft for my main theme, and this crime as the point of departure."

Standing before his mirror, broad as the demonstration blackboard, a flower between the fingers that with swift gestures illustrated his theme, Marmion Poole proceeded.

"Let me tell you, as an old hand, what you are up against. The effort of writing is nothing. The conception is nothing. It is a matter of toil and pain, and induces an immense fatigue; it destroys one's zest and one's pleasure in the occupations of normal daily life, certainly. Nevertheless, all this is nothing. It is the right and proper price to pay for the achieved creation.

But then, my son-in-law, then comes to you, the writer, the black hour. Your creation is completed out of nothing—airy nothing! You yourself, the creator, having put all you have into it, become, in turn, a nothing, an emptiness, a mere pawn, a sensation of fatigue, a vacuum. The created thing, separated from you, no longer yours, becomes the avenger of its own birth upon you. You exist but to regard it; you go over its perfect parts; you finger and adore; you are a worshipper of the god you have yourself created out of nothing; and, in accordance with the perfection of the idol, so does the time of your subjection endure. Not for ever. In time the new idea comes and deposes the created fact. And this, I assure you, is a release from hell—the hell of achievement. And this relief is permitted because the achieved creation is not, in fact, perfect. But suppose upon a day you created a perfect work of art, could you endure it? Could you escape from it ever? And consider what it would be always to sit in contemplation of your own achievement, a doomed man: because, your creation being perfect, there was no possibility of further achievement? Would not that drive any of us mad? Will you not pity, with me, the man who, even in so trivial an instance as this crime, becomes as God?"

Koko, accustomed to such manifestations of temperament, and making the mental comment that Poole was good value when you could get him talking, said now, bluntly:

"It's all right for you as an artist. But what about the public? You've got no right to start this hare again. We don't want a lot of amateur sleuths in false noses slinking round the Pack after clues. You're cheating the public if you suggest that there's a chance of anything coming out. It's not fair to hang a carrot in front of a donkey's nose and make it sweat its soul out running, and then take the carrot away."

"Your simile isn't exact," said Marmion. "The carrot is there, if the creature can stretch its greedy nose far enough forward."

"But you say you won't publish till the crime is discovered," said Koko. "And, as it never will be, since there aren't any clues or anything else to go by, and we don't even know if it's a crime at all——"

"You share my high opinion of the criminal, I observe," said Marmion lightly. "I'm glad of that. It may induce you to pardon my outburst in the *Jew's Harp*—a paper which, despite your strictures, ministers not unably to the more sinister imaginations of the public."

"Not your public, sir," reiterated Koko.

"My public is wide," said Marmion Poole. "It has been something of a revelation to me to see how far my web is flung: the strange contacts——" He relinquished the flower and went back to his desk, picking up the cuttings one after another and tossing them down.

"'Mr. Marmion Poole is a good example of the figure that can wear to perfection the new

double-breasted waistcoat.' That's the *Fife* for you. Here's a photograph from the *Looking-Glass*—both feet apparently in the air at once, but recognisable. Then this from a sporting journal—" The following story which is convulsing the clubs was told recently by Marmion Poole at a dinner——' What a weevily chestnut you've fathered on to me there! Koko—Koko Fry—you might at least have allowed me to make my own joke. How much better I'd have done it!"

"It wouldn't have convulsed the clubs, though," said practical Koko. "It'd be over everybody's head except Eliza Point's."

"And Horrie's," said Marmion absently, continuing to browse among the clippings of all lengths and breadths. Then, as though somebody else had spoken his own words and he heard them for the first time, he let the papers flutter down from his hands.

"I forgot," said Marmion slowly. "I'm always forgetting: and remembering again. I miss her often. She was the best audience I have ever had."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN — PAVANE FOR A DEAD THEORY

What, will my daughter prove a good musician ?
THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

POOR Horrie's room had been left by her successors purposely untouched as regards its decoration : but the piano had necessitated some rearrangement—the incongruous Victorian desk, for instance, had gone—a legacy to Miss Gigg. The portrait of Horrie hung now stately in the stately entrance-hall below ; to Rosalba had been allotted the pink quartz rosary that had lain for so many years upon the fender-topped table ; Sheridan as Surface had gone to Sir John Saumarez ; the famous caricature of himself had returned to Sir John Whittington ; the framed Browning verses to Eliza Point : the miniature of L. E. L. to Philibert Foulger. Horrie's legatees could not conceive on what principle Horrie had distributed her mourning rings among their friends and hers ; but it was a fact that each legatee was delighted with his own remembrance, and even six months later would say, as he handled and displayed the gift —" Dear Horrie ! " and simultaneously assure the visitor to whom he showed it that Horrie, like many good women, went through life with a bandage round her eyes : not much judge of character ; a great publisher ; and a fine business woman ; but she knew more about books

than men, and more about business than either.

"Koko's not looking well," said Savory, as he sat after dinner in Horrie's chair, and watched the Adonis on the roof without come alive through the drifting smoke of his cigarette.

Gilda looked at the speaker worriedly, and drooped as she sat at her keyboard. She said—paying out threads of tune and breaking them one after another:

"He's depressed, I think."

"I wonder why?" Savory said. "He's got most of the things a man wants—work he enjoys, a wife, a home."

"What else does a man want?" Gilda wondered idly.

"Sometimes," said Savory, "he wants abstract things. Justice, for instance."

"What does that mean?" said Gilda, swinging round to face him.

"Nothing very much," Savory admitted.

"I believe," said Gilda slowly, "that you know what's worrying him."

"I don't," said Savory, "I give you my word."

"Then find out for me," Gilda suddenly implored.

Savory looked at her in surprise.

"Oh, I know——" she went on. "I know I'm his wife. That's why I can't ask. One's told, you see: or, if one isn't told, one doesn't care to ask."

"Yes," said Savory, "I see."

He rose and began to walk up and down the

room—in and out again—continuing the conversation disjointedly.

"You're different too," Gilda went on. "You've got more restless, and more quiet, since Horrie died."

"I never was a talker," Savory rejoined. "Here's Koko, with the liqueur."

She swung to the piano again, and began slowly to build up the mad-sounding chords of Scriabin's Fourth Sonata.

"Take James out on the roof," said she to entering Koko, through the searing discords. "It's pleasanter there, and you won't be able to hear me."

"We like hearing you," Koko protested.

She made no answer, but under her strong hands the discords accumulated unbearably.

"I'll come in a minute," said she, engrossed. "Take your drinks outside."

The discords had their due effect on Koko.

"Well, what about it?" he suggested to his partner; and let Savory precede him to the roof. The light from the doorway streamed across the tiny garden, and lent colour to the flowers on which it fell. They sat down on two canvas chairs, and for a time were silent. In Horrie's sitting-room the sound of the piano ceased, as though the player's memory had failed her, and, when it was resumed, gave out the stately and tragic measure of a pavane.

"I like this," said Koko, rocking to it, one knee drawn up to his chin. "A bit like a funeral march, but gaudier."

"Poor Horrie," said Savory, without apparent reason.

But Koko caught the connection unerringly. "It's this place," said he. "I can't get her out of my mind either. Sentimental, I know."

"Sentimental?" Savory caught him up with a certain air of defiance. "Without sentiment it's—it's a devilish sort of world, I should say. People without sentiment—nothing controls them. You never know what they're going to do."

Koko looked at him narrowly.

"What's the matter with you, James? What have you got on your mind?"

"The world, I suppose. The world without sentiment. The devil's world."

Koko stared at him.

"You've got the needle too, have you?" said he.

"Too?" Savory challenged him. "Have you got it? What about?"

"Oh"—Koko's balanced foot swayed restlessly—"the whole show. You put it into my head, for that matter."

"Put what into your head?"

"All these dirty little suspicions," said Koko, kicking viciously at the air.

"Suspicions?"

"Don't play the goat," said Koko. "You know what I mean all right. About Poole."

"What about him?" Savory demanded.

Koko did not answer.

"What about Poole?" Savory repeated. "What have I said about Poole?"

"Nothing," said Koko sullenly. "You've asked one or two questions, that's all. Questions I didn't know the answer to at the time."

Savory waited.

"But I know now all right," Koko went on. "And it's perfectly simple, just as I thought. That isn't what's been worrying me."

"What then?" Savory asked.

"You!" returned Koko, point blank. "I can't make out what the hell you've been getting at. I don't see it and I don't like it. Why have you got such a down on Poole?"

"I think he's a vanity-sodden nuisance," Savory answered, "if you want to know."

"That doesn't make him a thief," Koko retorted.

"Who said he was a thief?"

"Well, what else did you mean about him going to Covent Garden that morning? Why have you been trying to get things out of his man? Because you've got some idea that he sneaked in here that morning somehow and burned his own stuff. Of all the silly notions——"

"Steady!" said Savory. "Hold on! I've never hinted or said anything of the kind."

"You've been at Elwes though," Koko insisted. "He told me."

"What did he tell you?" Savory asked calmly.

"You know perfectly well," said Koko again, his temper rising.

The big steady melody that had been flowing

through the open door suddenly ebbed, sank to a tinkle of odd chords. The men checked their talk as singers check when an accompaniment fails. Only a few broken phrases sounded, a few wry twists of tune that seemed as out of place as real tears at the funeral of a dead infanta. Then, with an impatient rushing scale, the stately chords began again, augmented, magnificent now with intricate-sounding patterns of notes like silver galloon worked upon a pall. But that moment of hesitation had changed the tone of the talk. Koko's voice was no longer angry when he continued :

" You must admit, Jim, it looked pretty fishy. After all, Poole's Gilda's father and you're my partner. It'd make it pretty awkward for me if he found out you'd been there asking questions."

" I went to see Mr. Poole at your request," Savory answered gravely, " to talk to him personally about the reissue of *The Buttonhole.* He wasn't in. He never does remember appointments ; which is the reason I went myself instead of asking him to come here. I talked to Elwes, yes, while I waited. He's an ex-service man—second Midshires—we were brigaded with them at one time. He's proud of Poole, proud of his peculiar ways. He told me about the fire in Poole's bedroom at night that has to be kept up every two hours."

" I could have told you that," said Koko. " What's the idea ? "

" I'm telling you what Elwes told me. You

seem to think I've been spying. I'm giving you the incident exactly as it happened."

"Well," said Koko. "Go on! What else?"

"I asked him if this went on all through the summer. He said yes, every night, without exception. And there's another standing order. Twice a week regularly Poole is called at five."

"I could have told you that too," said Koko. "He goes to Covent Garden."

"D'you know which days?"

"I suppose they vary," said Koko, surprised.

"Not they. They're as invariable as the order about the fire. Poole is called on all Tuesday mornings and all Fridays."

"I didn't know that," Koko admitted, "but it doesn't surprise me. He's an orderly bloke. Not like what you'd expect of a poet."

"D'you remember what day of the week we found Horrie?" Savory asked, and made a gesture toward the parapet.

"Can't remember," said Koko with wrinkled brows.

"It was a Tuesday," said Savory, and sat back in his chair.

Under Gilda's hands the mounting chords grew louder. The parade of sorrow was at its height, when Koko laughed, gladly, spontaneously.

"James, you're priceless," said he, recovering. "Worth your weight in handcuffs to Scotland Yard. But you're quite wrong, as it happens. Poole didn't go that morning to Covent Garden."

"How do you know?" Savory asked sharply.

"You didn't even remember the day of Horrie's death."

"No," said Koko simply, "but I remember the day I got engaged to Gilda. She'd—— We'd—— Well, anyhow, she and I had been walking about most of the night."

He glared at Savory, expecting him to laugh. But Savory's expression did not change.

"Well, as I say," resumed Koko, "we'd been walking about, and she'd just seen me off at the end of her street. But she didn't go home." He smiled at a memory. "She didn't tell me, but she'd been locked out; and so she had to go on walking about. About half-past six she was passing Poole's house, and out he came and they got talking. He knew who she was by that time. He'd spotted her shawl the night we went to *Right Behind*; and besides, Horrie'd told him. So he spoke to her and told her who he was—and—who she was. They got on pretty well. She went back to breakfast with him: and I found them together when I came at nine. So there you are," finished Koko, and stretched his arms upwards with a gesture of relief.

"I see," said Savory quietly. "So Poole didn't get his flowers that morning? Well, that settles it; nothing doing there."

Koko did not hear the last words; for as they were spoken the music slowed to a close on a wistful sequence and ceased. The stream of light was obscured by Gilda's tall figure in the doorway. Koko held out a hand to her as she came near.

"Jim's been making a fool of himself," said he.

She looked at him. The light falling across his face showed, she thought, a shadow lifted from it. She caught at the hand; her eyes inquired of Savory if the trouble were indeed at an end.

"Yes, it's all right." Savory answered the unspoken question. "Koko's been worrying about a senseless thing I did—a misunderstanding. We've cleared it up."

He had risen as Gilda advanced, and now held out his hand to her.

"But you're not going yet," she said, surprised. "It's not ten yet."

"Sit down, man!" Koko added. "You haven't drunk your Benedictine. Sit down and give us your views on the universe."

"I've bored you long enough," said Savory. "I ought to go home."

"What do you do at home?" Gilda asked suddenly. "I can't picture you there, somehow. What's it like, Jim? What sort of things do you enjoy doing?"

"Yes," Koko encouraged him, "give a slight account of yourself *à la Who's Who*. Age?"

"Thirty-six," Savory answered, falling in with their mood.

"Educated?"

"Partly."

"Married?"

"No."

"Lucky man," Koko approved, lightly swinging his wife's hand. "Recreations?"

"Putting two and two together," Savory answered strangely.

"And do they always make four?" Gilda asked.

"Very seldom," said Savory, shaking his head. "Two and two may add up to anything in this world or out of it; but two and one always come to the same thing."

"What's that?" Koko asked lazily.

"A crowd," Savory answered, with his ugly smile that yet held something of pleading, the pain of a temperament that knows its own loneliness but cannot assail its own barriers. He held out his hand once more. Koko struggled to his feet.

"Must you, Jim?" said he, a hand on the other's arm.

"I think so," Savory answered. "Good night."

He dropped Gilda's hand and turned away, waving back Koko, who would have followed.

"Don't bother," said Savory from the doorway. "I know my way."

But the hospitable Koko would not let a guest see himself off the premises. It still gave him a thrill to play host. He helped with the overcoat, opened the door, turned lights on, waited for the thud of the front door, turned the lights off again, and went back to Gilda.

She was sitting in the chair he had left, her long hands clasped behind her head. She looked toward him, but said nothing as he stepped out on to the roof beside her.

" Jim's gone," said he.

Gilda nodded.

" I wonder," said Koko, " I wonder why he went so early."

" He doesn't like coming to the flat," said Gilda. " He hates seeing us here. He misses Horrie. He loved Horrie."

" Yes," said Koko. " He was saying that if it wasn't for sentiment this world would be a hell of a place."

" D'you think he's right ? " Gilda asked softly.

" Yes," said Koko, his voice on a level with hers. " I do, by God ! "

Adonis, invoked, smiled on them from his pedestal.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN — THE FAINT PURSUER

ARTEMIDORUS: *Delay not, Cæsar; read it instantly.*
CÆSAR: *What, is the fellow mad? . . .*
CASSIUS: *What, urge you your petitions in the street? Come to the Capitol.*

JULIUS CÆSAR.

MARMION POOLE'S dinner-party, from every point of view, was a success. Gilda, in an ash-grey frock, sat with her back to the blue-grey night. Her plaits of hair, wound tightly round her head, shone in the light of the many candles like a gilt crown. She was a success with Sir John Whittington, who recognised in her quiet modernity a revival of a fashion of his youth, and told her so.

"Koko chose it," said Gilda happily. "He does everything."

"Don't be so bridal," reproved Eliza Point. But Philibert Foulger intervened, delighted.

"My dear Eliza, don't you be so old-fashioned. It's the very latest pose. She assumes it purposely; and I'm terribly grateful to her. It's what I want for my first act."

"What? Writing another play already?" Eliza groaned.

"I am," said Philibert. "For Lady Saumarez."

"Me?" said Martella Saumarez, astonished. "What about Johnnie? It's no good sending me stuff, Philibert, that's no use to Johnnie."

He spread his supple hands.

"You see——" He displayed the women to each other. "They're both in the fashion. They play the devoted wife. They're setting a Home fashion. Everybody's following it. What they do it for, I don't know. But does anybody ever understand why women follow the fashion?"

Martella remained serene.

"I like being married," she said. "So does Mrs. Fry. And I tell you what—so does Johnnie! Don't you, Johnnie? He's sorry for you, Philibert. Yes, and for you too, Mr. Poole. So's Koko, aren't you, Koko? There's something about being married," said Martella, her eye on Gilda, a little out of things, she fancied, in this gathering of people who knew each other well, "that makes one feel detached, benevolent. You know what I mean, Mrs. Fry, don't you?"

Gilda nodded, beaming.

"I'm going to be adorable to struggling authors," she said. "And—two months ago I wouldn't have thought it my business and wouldn't have wanted to."

"Exactly," said Martella. "And I'm always making John interview people from the R.A.D.A. It's the same impulse. Every business woman ought to be married, I think, just as every artist man ought to be married. Makes them less jumpy," said Martella, "if you know what I mean."

"But I don't." Marmion was interested.

" Where's your distinction ? A business woman and an artist man ? But aren't there artist women ? "

" Oh, no," said Martella seriously. " All artists are men."

The femininity screamed at her. Marmion leaned forward listening with interest. Philibert raised his eyebrows. But Martella knew what she meant, and continued serenely, " Women are really domesticated—housewives and mothers. ' Business ' is an emancipation to 'em just as ' art ' is emancipation to a man whose natural job is business. But art is beyond women altogether—except the freaks. Business is like an art to a woman. If she pretends to be an artist she can only manage it by making a business of it ; that's what I mean. Look at me ! I'm not an artist. If I get it across I'm making a business of my acting, and Mr. Savory as a publisher is just a business man ; but Mrs. Fry will make her publishing business into an art, just as poor Horrie did. Now Koko will be ruined if you let him in on the business end, my dear," she concluded, nodding to the absorbed Gilda. " He'll just become dull. Business is fatal to artists, and publicity is an art. It's a form of novel-writing. Make Koko stick to that—if he is an artist."

" Of course he is," said Gilda indignantly, " and he's writing a novel."

The table chuckled.

" Well, if he is," said Martella, " don't let him have anything to do with the business end

of novel-writing. It was ruining Johnnie, the business end," said Martella affectionately. " He married me only just in time."

Sir John shrugged helpless acquiescence.

" Yes, she's taken it all over," he admitted. " I'm only allowed to act nowadays. She drives me on—just as poor Horrie used to drive you, Marmion. Poor Horrie ! "

" Poor Horrie ! " murmured the table.

" Poor Horrie ! " said Savory, suddenly, loudly, heartily, and began to laugh. And, still laughing, felt blindly for his glass and drank chokingly : and so came, with a shudder, to silence. The table was struck dumb, and sat staring. Marmion sprang to his feet and went over to him.

" My dear fellow, aren't you well ? "

Savory rose heavily.

" I—I don't know what it is. I feel rather—shaky. I'd like to sit quietly somewhere," he said. " D'you mind ? "

" My dear fellow, of course ! Shall I ring up my doctor ? What is it ? "

" It's all right." Savory's glance apologised to the table. " I have these turns. Yes—giddy—a legacy—Egypt—a touch of the sun. Can I sit in your room, Poole ? I'll be all right in ten minutes."

The two men withdrew together. The solicitous Marmion had a hand under Savory's elbow. The company could hear the unsteady feet upon the staircase and the host's soothing voice.

" Legacy, eh ? " said Whittington, sighing.

Said Koko, with an air of suspicion :

" I've never known him go like this before, though."

Philibert nodded.

" They say no man who was through the war can be considered altogether normal. They're always liable to do odd things. Always subject to odd attacks."

" He has been odd lately," said Koko. " Horrie's death upset him badly." He turned to the returning Marmion. " Is he all right ? "

" Lying down," said Marmion. " Still looks white. Said he only wanted quiet, so I left him. I believe in letting people manage themselves "—and he looked with a certain air of hostility at the benevolent Martella.

" Oh, I don't," said that lady, returning to the charge. " The world would be lost without its " —she sighed—" its Horries."

" You're right," Philibert agreed. " How we all talk of her. D'you notice ? We run round the subject of her just like people hunting a lost landmark. Whenever we meet, someone says, ' Now, Horrie—— ' "

He broke off.

Marmion, who had stood listening instead of going back to his place, spoke suddenly to Gilda.

" Spoil us," said he persuasively. " Play to us. Now. While we drink our coffee. I wish you would."

She shook her head.

" I should only play something depressing. You talk about Horrie till I want to cry."

"Don't be sentimental," said Marmion sharply. "Horrie would have hated that."

"Yes," interpolated Philibert. "She was one for cheerful noises, was Horrie."

Martella thrust in.

"Well, I don't know. I'd like to be mourned for if I were dead, and so I think she would. I'd value it. I don't see why people should grow inhumanly sensible all of a sudden just because they're dead. I think she'd be flattered to be talked about just a little sentimentally."

"*Is* flattered," said Philibert suddenly. "Eh, Marmion?"

Marmion nodded.

"Yes, she's curiously present, restlessly present. Poor Horrie!"

Said Gilda:

"I suppose when a person dies like that——"

"Like what?" said Marmion sharply, so sharply that the table full of guests stared, and Gilda flushed.

"I only mean—so unexpectedly, so entirely without preparation: blotted out by an accident before their time. Such people—such removed people—can't leave a sense of peace behind them. They're not finished, you see, down here. All the things that they've left undone must clamour, trumpet-tongued," cried Gilda, flushing, "against such taking off. At least, if one has ears to hear."

"You've got it wrong," said Marmion moodily.

"Got what wrong?"

"Your quotation. 'The deep damnation of their taking off!' You should always verify your quotations."

Sir John Saumarez thrust in. He had, as usual, been watching his old friend.

"She's right, Marmion," said he. "You do feel Horrie's death just as sentimentally as the rest of us—if you choose to call it sentimental."

"Of course I feel it," he returned savagely. "What do you think of me? I've raged against Horrie and her maddening ways in my time, but now that I'm rid of her do you suppose that I don't miss her? Don't be a fool!" Then, on a complete change of note: "Here! What's that?"

"Rid of her?" began John Saumarez. Then, in common with the rest of the company, followed his host's glance. It was fixed upon the ceiling, and his hand, uplifted, commanded silence.

He was obeyed. And in it a singular though faint creaking sound was clearly heard.

"That's the drawer of my writing-chest, cried Marmion. "Somebody's at my writing-chest. Excuse me!" He flung down his napkin and made a dash for the door.

Koko rose.

"Burglars!" cried Koko on a joyful note. "Come on, Foulger! Come on, Sir John! No, not you, Gilda! You women stay where you are!"

He headed the dash to the stairs, was the

first up, the first in the room, the first to take in the significance of the picture presented—Marmion, white with rage, confronting his guest, James Savory, a sullen Savory, a Savory surprised upon his knees before the half-open drawer of Marmion Poole's writing-chest.

"What's all this?" demanded the hitherto silent Whittington. "Poole? Savory?"

"I found him like this," said Marmion, and laughed.

Koko Fry, after the first moment of stupefaction, went to his partner and caught him by the shoulders as though to wake him, to wake them both out of a bad dream.

"Jim——" said Koko Fry. "Jim, old man——"

"I've been spying round, haven't I?" Savory asked him grimly. "Now you know why."

"But I don't," said Koko unhappily, like a small boy. "I don't know. What are you after?"

"Let it alone," said Savory, putting aside the small boy.

He turned to the two Sir Johns and the wide-eyed Philibert Foulger, assisting for once in their lives at a drama played within all four walls.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Savory, "I am glad to have you here as witnesses. You'll see fair play."

"My dear fellow," said kindly Sir John Whittington, "my dear Savory, you're not well."

"I'm well enough," Savory interrupted, and added with an unhumorous smile—"but I'm sorry you caught me before I got at the truth."

"The truth of what?" Sir John insisted. "You owe Mr. Poole an explanation. You must tell us, I think, what you were doing. Marmion, you'll accept what he says?"

"Certainly," said Marmion, cool once more. "If the explanation's reasonable. My telephone is here. I'd be glad to know whether I'm to ring up the doctor or the police."

"I suggest the police," said Savory. "I came here to steal."

"Don't listen to him, sir," cried Koko suddenly. "Don't listen, Sir John! You don't know what he'll say. He's off his head. He's been queer for weeks."

But the four men, looking at Savory, could find in his appearance nothing of madness. He was sullen; his jaw was set like a bulldog's; but his voice was steady and his eyes were sane. Sir John Whittington nodded to him to proceed.

"Go on!" said Sir John. "We're listening."

Savory addressed himself to Marmion Poole.

"Do you remember," said he, "a certain brag of yours? You made it recently; and took half the papers in England into your confidence. You said that you had written out your theory, a full explanation of the burning of your manuscript and all that such burning implied."

"I made that statement," Marmion agreed.

"You wrote it all out, didn't you? And you pledged yourself to make it public the moment the criminal was found?"

Marmion's eye considered him with interest, and travelled past him to the writing-chest.

"So that's it?" said he meditatively. "That's what you were looking for—that story? What's your motive? A longing to be 'first with the news,' as one of your estimable dailies has it? Not the first time," said Marmion, "that I've done the work and you've had the credit. You remember a certain incident in Cairo, Major Savory?"

"I remember," Savory answered. "It's not the kind of story one forgets. I learned something from it, something about you. You're the kind of man that boasts and makes good."

Marmion Poole laughed and made him a slight, ironical bow.

"What is all this?" Sir John Whittington asked. "Make yourself clear, Mr. Savory! Or you, Poole, if you understand the situation? I confess I'm still in the dark."

"It's simple enough," said Savory. "Mr. Poole has written out the facts of Tuesday night, June the second. I call upon him to produce that story."

"There were conditions——" Sir John began.

"Fulfilled, sir!" said Savory calmly. "The criminal's found."

There was a moment of silence. Savory squared his shoulders and faced the four men.

"I burned that manuscript," he said very quietly. "You all heard me, but I'll repeat it. I burned the manuscript of *Reflections* in the grate of Horrie's flat; and I'll take the consequences."

"And all that it implies?" said Marmion softly. "Will you confess to the implications too, Major Savory?"

"When," said Savory steadily, "you've made good your boast." And stood as one awaiting an immediate answer.

It did not come. Koko stood staring, frowning, nervously pulling at the lapel of his dinner-jacket. Sir John Whittington, amazed, looked from one to the other of the protagonists. Foulger turned his eyes from the solid challenger to the challenged, on whom the gaze of the actor-manager was already fixed. Marmion Poole, indeed, was better worth attention. His fine nostrils flared, his clenched hand was drawn back; yet he had an air of surveying with amusement as well as anger the man who had sent up in smoke twenty months of his labour, twenty years of his life.

Sir John Whittington sat down and put his handkerchief to his forehead.

"Yes," he said heavily. "But what are we going to do?"

"Scotland Yard, I think," said Sir John Saumarez, stepping toward the telephone. This was a line he knew.

"No," said Koko Fry, and caught him back. "I don't believe this. Jim's lying. Why, good

God "—he went on, turning bewildered eyes on the other man—" you don't believe it, do you? It's—it's silly."

" I stand by what I've said," Savory interposed. " It's for Mr. Poole to do the same."

" But what do you want? " Koko asked despairingly. " What good's it going to do you? Don't you see, if you were in Horrie's flat that night, what it leads to? "

" What do I want? " said Savory, disregarding the last half of the speech. " I want to know how Mr. Poole's two and two add up. It's my recreation, you remember, adding two and two. Mr. Poole's an honest writer; we all know that. And he's an honest boaster—or used to be. I'd like to see both qualities in action for once."

" But, Savory," said Sir John Saumarez, reasoning, " if your story's true, we can't let you go. Scotland Yard——"

" I haven't asked you to let me go," Savory interrupted. " I've asked Mr. Poole to read us his story—here and now. Ring up the station and have in a couple of constables if you like. I can't get away. I don't want to get away. I just want to hear how clever Mr. Poole has been. Oh, I know he's clever, better than you do! I know one or two stories—not exactly pretty, but neat. I'll tell those first, if you like, and he can follow on. How about it, Mr. Poole? "

All eyes now were on the man challenged. He hesitated. Then:

"The stuff's not here," said Marmion Poole, very white.

In the pause that ensued, Savory laughed: an ugly sound at which Marmion winced like a horse under the lash, and like a horse reared his head.

"You ask for it, do you?" said he. "Then I'll give it to you, by God! But the stuff's not here."

He kicked shut the drawer of the writing-chest Savory had opened and laughed in his turn, delicately, scornfully, his nostrils still stretched wide and the breath coming quickly through them. He turned to his son-in-law.

"Ask your wife," said he, "if she will be good enough to let me have the key of her safe."

"But, Marmion," Sir John Whittington intervened, "this is folly. You'll take no notice of this, surely? The whole business is fantastic."

"Fantastic?" Marmion echoed. "I follow fantasy as other men follow reason. Oh, he knows his man! Fantastic—yes. Incredible—yes. And therefore I accept it. Go to Gilda," he commanded Koko Fry, "or wait! I'll come with you. Keep an eye on that fellow," said he to the others. "Bring him down in a minute or two. We are going to the Pack."

"At this hour?" said Sir John Whittington, marvelling. "But the ladies——"

"I'll explain," Marmion answered. "Come, Koko!"

Together, in silence, K. K. Fry and his father-in-law left the room and descended, to find that the ladies, curiosity having overwhelmed obedience, were grouped at the foot of the stairs preparing to ascend. With one accord, with one word, they greeted the two men.

"Burglars?"

"No," said Marmion, smiling. "An absurd situation has arisen, a kind of wager: a challenge, rather. And"—his blue eyes implored them, apologised, laughed—"we're dying to settle it now."

"What is it?" Gilda asked, looking past Marmion's smile to her husband's pale face.

"An absurdity," Marmion said swiftly, before Koko could speak, "as I told you. It means a ten minutes' drive across London. Will the sterner sex forgive us?"

He put his hands on Gilda's shoulders and piloted her gently to the dining-room. Invited by his look, the inquisitive ladies followed.

"But what's happening?" asked Eliza Point. "You're putting us off, Marmion. You know quite well someone's been murdered and you're keeping it dark."

"Perhaps," said he. "If there's a mystery—and there is, I don't deny—I'll clear it up, I promise. Meanwhile the shadows must deepen. Gilda, my child, will you help me?"

"How?" she murmured.

"Only your key," said he. "The key of your safe. Will you trust it to me for an hour?"

Slowly she fumbled in her evening bag, to the

accompaniment of breathless little laughs and inquiries, shot like arrows at Marmion Poole.

" Where are you going ? "

" You're simply a lot of children ! "

" They've been reading thrillers, that's what it is."

Marmion took from his daughter's hand a tiny intricate key, and with solemnity held it up before them.

" A key," said he. " Isn't that, of all words, the most magical ? From Sesame, by way of the silken clue that led through Rosamond's maze, descends, in direct succession—Mr. Chubb. Which of us poets can claim a more honourable ancestry ? "

He left his own question unanswered and bowed to them all over his daughter's head. His eyes were naughtily triumphant, the eyes of a child keeping a secret with difficulty and inward chuckles.

" But what's going to happen ? " Gilda begged turning in her chair. " Are you all leaving us ? "

There was a shuffling sound of feet in the hall.

" We'll be back in an hour," he soothed her. " Meanwhile, keep your ladies happy. Give them delicious things to drink. Play to them, Gilda ! Play them something mysterious, something with a question. The Warum of Schumann, perhaps. You shall know all in good time."

He gestured his farewells, and went away. The astonished women heard the crowding footsteps go silently through the hall and out

of the door. No sound of voices went with them. The unexplained silence entered the room, descended upon the women, puzzled and frightened them, and kept them for some fifteen seconds utterly still. Then Gilda laughed and rose.

"Twenty past nine," she said, and pointed to the clock for explanation of the pause. "No wonder! Shall we go upstairs? And, if you'd care, I'll play."

CHAPTER NINETEEN — ADONIS ON THE ROOF

And now 'tis dark, and going, I shall fall.

VENUS AND ADONIS.

MARMION and Savory and the two older men bundled into the first taxi and left Philibert and Koko to follow in another, though Marmion lightly protested that he needed Koko as a body-guard.

"You do," said Savory savagely.

Marmion laughed aloud.

"My good Savory," said he, "your rôle of house-dog is over! You should be considering your kennelled future. Shouldn't he, John?"

He turned to Sir John Saumarez, elegant as himself beside him, and, receiving no answering smile, rallied him.

"Johnnie, how morosely you sit there! Have you ceased to enjoy adventure? Does it call up no memories? Yet we drive through London escorting a suspect."

"We're not in the mood, Marmion," said old Sir John Whittington stonily.

"Ah, well," returned Marmion, "it's a long time since Andorra, certainly. Just as you please." And said no more till they reached Vandeleur Street and entered and ascended. But when the flat door was opened to them by

Koko, very much the host, Marmion made it plain that their lack of response had robbed the adventure of its interest for him also. He strolled over to the fireplace and stood, absorbed in the contemplation of his own portrait, until Koko, after a general hesitation, approached him.

"Well?" he demanded amiably. "What now?"

"The key," said Koko nervously. "Gilda gave it to you."

"Oh, the key," returned Marmion. "And what do you want the key for?" Koko might have been four years old by his tone.

"Don't be ridiculous, Marmion!" said Sir John Saumarez. "It's not a jesting matter."

"He's not jesting," growled Savory. "He never has yet. You wait. He'll trickle through our fingers yet. Watch him!"

"The key, sir, please," said Koko, distressed.

Marmion gave it to him, and, without more ado, undid the French windows, turned on a switch, and strolled out on to the roof; paused to inspect with a brotherly air the bronze Adonis, red-lighted by Horrie's Japanese lanterns, white-lighted by the moon.

"None of that!" cried Savory instantly, and pounded after him.

"What's the matter?" said Marmion, not bothering to turn. And then, raising his voice: "Saumarez, control me our Savory! He's gone mad."

"Somebody's mad," said Sir John, looking

from one to the other as he came out. "What is it now, Savory?"

"Keeping an eye on the fire-escape," said Savory. "I know him."

"As you see—quite mad," said Marmion, nodding to Saumarez confidentially and offering a cigarette. "No?" And then: "Well, Koko?"

For Koko, followed by Philibert Foulger and Sir John Whittington, had hurried out. Koko was agitated, and Savory, watching, grinned as Saumarez, also watching, observed with interest.

"No papers, eh?" said Savory. "I thought as much."

"What?" cried John Saumarez. "What? No papers? Now, look here, Marmion——"

Marmion, sinking into the comfortable wicker chair under the Japanese lanterns, smiled upon the group.

"Don't agitate yourselves," he implored. "It's in my pocket. Of course—all the time. My dear good people, am I likely to leave dynamite in a lady's parlour—twice? Surely I've had my lesson. No, I had it with me, of course. And I'm perfectly ready to read it to you—in my own time and my own place. But would you have consented to come here with me? John might." He smiled fraternally at Sir John Saumarez. "He understands the value of a setting. By the way, you dwarfed yourself, I thought, John, in the second act of *Skyscrapers*. Yes, I saw it last week. Oh, admirable, admirable! But too unselfish, John!

You lack egotism. You shouldn't give everyone in the company a better part than yourself. I can't think why you do it."

"Oh, get on, get on!" growled Savory.

Marmion smiled.

"Forgive me. I was explaining why I dragged you here, that was all. My fault—egotism if you choose. But I had this roof-tree in my mind when I wrote, and I felt that here, and nowhere but here, would you appreciate"—he drew from his pocket a fold of papers—"this! I'll read it to you myself if I may. Let me tell you that you are the audience I would have chosen; only I wish we had Horrie here. Then it would have been perfect. However, we shall think of her, no doubt. It is very strange that we cannot help thinking of her. But won't you sit down?"

Koko, fascinated, obeyed; and after a moment Philibert swung over to the fountain and dropped on to the low seat which the curved edge afforded. But the other three stood. Savory and Sir John Saumarez leaned on either prop of the iron stair-head; while Sir John Whittington, disdaining all support, stood squarely in the middle of the neat crazy pavement, one foot crushing a patch of purple bloom, his white hair silvered by the moonlight.

"Begin," said he: and there was authority in his tone, an authority of age, experience, and rectitude. No one laughed at old-fashioned John Whittington. Even the smile that Marmion now offered him was submissive.

"Well—if you are really ready," said Marmion, and turned over a page. "I've cast it in the form of a short story. Why? Oh, my whim! My way! I must do things in my own way. I've written it in the first person."

"Did that make it easier to write?" said Savory suddenly. The other men, turning to him, saw with amazement that his usually impassive face was ablaze with excitement. Mobility did not add to his charm. Koko, as he stared at him, thought with horror that, if ever a man looked like murder, Savory was that man. What, after all, did he know of Savory? He had a sick, confused vision of this new Savory, alone with Horrie, that look on his face, while Horrie babbled out plans for taking Savory's authority from him, of sharing his authority with Marmion Poole.

Koko roused himself from that nightmare suspicion to attend to Marmion's answer.

"Did it make it easier? That you shall hear," said Marmion Poole—and began to read aloud.

"I am a poet, and therefore precise. But Society is composed chiefly of Philistines who are incapable of comprehending that exactitude is a precipitant of poetry. Therefore, since live we will, we live with wild hair and vague eyes; our tenure is erratic, our conduct illogical. Thus we conform outwardly with the Philistine's conception of the poetic figure; but within we remain precise.

"This I have proved in my own life and in my own art. The exact phrase satisfies me, and

no other phrase. In my life I am equally impatient of imperfection. I will go in rags, or I will dress perfectly. I have, in the course of my experience, appeared as beggar and as beau with equal satisfaction. But I will not compromise. In my relations with my fellow men —and women—I give and I take; I borrow and I pay. I do not speak of money; money is like air, common to all, a means whereby we live. I will not consider myself in debt to any man or woman because I take their money. But a kiss or a blow—these I have always returned. I am precise.

"But when I say 'always' I break my own law. How can I say 'always' when for many years, until to-night in fact, my art and my life have been disordered by the existence of a woman? Let her pass for one, at least. She said once that I had never understood her: it is the most feminine remark that I have ever heard her make. I have still a suspicion that she is—was—right, and the suspicion troubles me. It has hampered me in paying my debt.

"She is—was—I am precise again, thank God!—a ridiculous woman. Her ideas, indeed, were so singularly contradicted and cancelled out by my own that life on the same planet became at last impossible. Conceive a Shylock who delights in lending, waves aside all offers of payment, never reminds you when you meet on the Rialto of your debt! Would you not hate him, Antonio, for never remembering his right to a pound of flesh? Were you flattered,

Antonio, to be the object of Shylock's protestations of friendship? What would you have said, endured, if they have proved genuine?

"My Shylock's protestations were genuine. Actually, the woman liked me! She had no passion for me, and yet she loaded me with benefits which I was given no opportunity to repay; for I know nothing of the tepidities of feeling which she displayed and would have enjoyed seeing me display in return; and the response that I was prepared to make she met with a tedious tale of youthful passion for some greengrocer's lad. No, she was not in love with me, nor I, need I say, with her; but somehow, I don't know how, she made herself indispensable to me. She had, for one thing, the gift—Shylock's gift—of turning what she touched to gold. Her business capacity was invaluable; invaluable, too, was her advice. She had, incredibly, a brain as well-trained as my own. She was in a sense my complement. There was a beautiful precision in the correspondence of our characters; we were, may I say, a buhl cabinet and its reverse. It was our tragedy that she was all that I am not; her tragedy, rather, for how should it affect me? I was merely sorry for her that she had no emotion, that she was a mere tedious, virtuous woman who did not know how to buy, wear, or discard clothes, but had the gift of being indispensable and unobtrusive. Yes, she was triumphantly unobtrusive; never did she make a claim. But what would you do, Antonio, in such a case?

If Shylock hung upon your arm in the Rialto, then you would be easy; but suppose he did not so much as molest you! Would not that add to your intolerable burden?

"I need not enumerate the items of the intolerable bill she piled up against me. Suffice it that after—fifteen years of friendship, was her phrase—she—Shylock, Shylock, Shylock!—presented her account, unexpectedly presented her account. And I had nothing with which to pay it.

"She pressed her knife against my breast, nearest my heart, and assured me that I had the wherewithal to pay. I had but to give up my character, my theory, my practice, the law by which I live—my precision, that is—in order to satisfy her. I had but to renounce the cherished notion of a lifetime, the completed repayment of all my debts to all the world—save her—and I was free! She, the serious fool, staring at me across my own table, said, 'Give me my pound of flesh!' She worded it differently, of course. 'If thy hand offend thee, cut it off!' was her phrase. She wanted me, you see, to change my nature, to conform to some archangelic image she had made of me. Preserve me from the feminine idealist!

"I would not do it.

"Then Shylock threatened. She would use her private knowledge of me. She had already used it. Like that other smug gentlewoman, she knew what she should not. It was clear to me as I capitulated, and she, with her silly

rueful smile, conveyed congratulations upon this resurgence of my nobler nature, that precision required her elimination. The cabinet must have no duplicate in reverse.

" When she had left me I went to bed. Elwes ministered as usual. When he left me I took the coloured bust that stands upon my mantelpiece and laid it in the dent of my pillow where my own head had lain. A coat doubled continued the outline. I pulled up the counterpane and let the frill of the pillow droop over the stiff head. Even in the light the illusion was perfect : and Elwes is under orders never to turn on the light. He creeps in every two hours to mend my fire by the hearth light. I made no difference in my orders for that night. I assumed a cloak I had not yet worn. I turned out the light and left the room and the house unseen.

" The moon was sinking, the night misty and warm. It took me half an hour to reach Vandeleur Street. I enjoyed the walk. As I turned the corner I saw her, stumping ahead of me. No, this was not luck, merely precision. I knew her times and seasons. She never stayed later than she planned. I let her mount the steps and fumble for her key. Then, as she opened it on the darkness of the passages, I stepped up and in after her. Said I :

" ' My dear ! '

" She jumped sky-high. She was a woman without poise.

" I said :

" ' You told me to come when I liked. Here I am. May I stay ? '

" Then, recognising me, she displayed the ridiculous good temper which for years I have found irritating. You would conceive that it gave her enormous pleasure to see me again. She caught my hand, shook it, hustled me into the lift—all this by the light of her torch ; for the wires, she told me, were out of order. Now that, indeed, was a piece of luck. There would be no shadows on the blinds and so forth, no wakeful neighbour noting the instant of general illumination. I wondered, for an instant, as we stepped out of the lift, whether the place and the hour were already met together. But I had no excuse for sending it down. Besides, I had another plan.

" She drew me into the small sitting-room that she used because it led on to her roof garden. She had this formidable craze for fresh air. The door stood wide ; and the Adonis I had once given her shone like silver. The moon had travelled her course and was going down over the blank wall beyond. The woman was pleased and excited : it was soon plain to me that she took my visit as a gesture of peace. She thanked me for showing I could not bear to be at odds with her. She knelt at her hearth, brewed some mess and offered me a cup of it ; and then, when I would not drink of her cup—wine, spirits, food, fruit (she always ran to her cupboards when she was pleased)—I stretched myself on the long couch and

watched her in her frame, her characteristic, overcrowded room with innumerable mementoes of friends and clients, clients and friends (I never knew which way round she reckoned it), with photographs, sketches, caricatures, the case of Roman glass, and an absurd illuminated text over her desk, the locked case of priceless manuscript, the Watts portrait of a philanthropist of Horrie's youth and adoration, the Ospovat caricature of herself, my own portrait by Vetch staring down at me, damnably young, and my own manuscripts lying upon the table.

"It was a curious moment for me. I was, you will understand, bidding farewell to her, bidding farewell also to that former self of mine which for her was Marmion Poole. I now perceived that I had a distinct feeling for the woman in this moment of farewell, ridiculous as she was and old, but I did not feel that I had wasted myself in giving her all these years the confidence and acquaintance of that younger self. I perceived, not for the first time, that she talked well and that, since I should no longer be bothered with the quality of her voice, her attitude to me and the world, her benevolent ignorance of life and me, had in its consistency a certain magnificence. The woman was so entirely wrong, so completely and utterly wrong in her impressions of all that she saw that, practically, she created for herself a duplicate world, an arrested world in which she and all her friends moved, young and kind and innocent, believing in the fairy tale of life.

It was, I belatedly realised, attractive to hear her earnestly chatter of this world of hers, this world which had no existence save within her own brain. But when she introduced the present-day Marmion Poole and his affairs into it, she broke the spell. She taught me how much I had matured. I would not any longer be an inhabitant of her world.

"She said eagerly, 'You've thought it over? I see you have. And so now you don't ask me to publish? Oh, the relief! But the waste! Don't I know? Don't I feel? I've thought about it all the evening. Marmion, couldn't you transpose it? Can't you use the same material in novel form?'

"Her English was execrable, but she had ideas. She was right. It was a new idea, a brilliant, an all-enlightening idea. She was perfectly right. My life is a romance worth recreating. I may do it yet; though she will not publish it. Possibly I shall dedicate it to her. That would pay, I fancy, all debts.

"I said, 'You may be right. It's too soon to judge. Frankly, I'm not at the moment in the mood——'

"She broke in. She would never let one finish a sentence.

"'Depressed, aren't you? Hideously. I know. I've upset you of course. But I had to. I hate doing it.'

"I said, 'It's a close night,' and closed my eyes. You can always get these elderly women on the maternal side. I saw her,

through my eyelashes, delighting to nurse me. She poured out a liqueur and put it into my hand. I drank. She watched. I stood up. She said anxiously, 'You do look white. You do look drawn. You're not ill, are you, Marmion? Come out into the air!'"

"She had always had a trick of knowing what I wanted next, and I wanted her to propose going out into the air. I would have let her walk ahead of me while I considered the lie of the roof garden, but she took me firmly by the elbow, the old dragooning way, and pushed me before her.

"I released myself when we got outside, and strolled over to the low parapet.

"'Better?' said she, following me. 'It's a strange night. Isn't the mist ghostly? But it's beautiful up here.'

"'I like those black shadows,' I said, looking down into the paved yard far below. 'It reminds me of that passage in *The Buttonhole* —"small tombs and places of the dead."'

"'Coal-sheds and dust-bins,' she answered, jarring my mood. As we watched there was a clatter, a terrific noise shaking the night. I started. 'It's my cat,' said she. 'She will get down among the dust-bins. I've given up trying to prevent her.' But she began to call, and I stopped her hastily.

"'Don't disturb the night,' I said. She might have waked a neighbour, though I do not think there were any bedrooms or sleeping-places in those tall empty buildings that

surrounded us. It was a business quarter. Still, I take no unnecessary risks.

"I went on talking, knowing that it was time to make an end.

"'We are high,' said I.

"'Yes,' she said. 'The air's better. I've never regretted furnishing myself a flat up here.'

"I said, 'Do you never feel in the least giddy, standing on a height?'

"'No,' said she, looking down into the darkness.

"'For you are on a height,' I said, 'a toppling height! All London's at your feet! In literature and in life, my dear, we all of us are at your feet!'

"'It sounds thrilling,' said she.

"'All of us,' I repeated, and knelt.

"She stooped down to me.

"'Marmion, don't be silly! Are you crazy?'

"'At your feet,' said I, and laid my hands upon her small neat ankles, and, looking up, saw her face flush. The flush looked dark grey in the moonlight.

"She said in a vexed voice of tolerant common sense:

"'Dear me! I oughtn't to have given you brandy. Get up, Marmion!' And then, in a startled small voice—'Marmion, dear, be careful!'

"I jerked her feet from under her, and she went backwards in a ridiculous somersault over the parapet."

Koko, huddled in his chair, gave a strangled cry. Marmion, his hands shaking so that the thin sheaf of papers fluttered and rustled, looked up.

" The word ' ridiculous ' disturbs you ? But one must be precise. I assure you it was the word that flashed upon my mind as I acted. It was not my friend ; it was a bundle of clothes, you understand ; an Aunt Sallie ; or better still, much better, a broody hen dragged from her nest and pitched fluttering and squawking over the hedge. The bundle cried out, ' Marmion, dear ! ' It was her habit to call me dear—me—her secretary—anyone. She did not understand the dignity of words in life, though in literature she was reliable. ' Dear '—at such a moment ! And then came the crash below. But I have written of it here :

" . . . reverberating in walled spaces upon which I looked down. It was not very much louder than the noises which we had heard a moment before. If the empty buildings had had inmates they would have been satisfied with the familiar explanation—the starved cats of London busy among the garbage bins. She did not move after she fell, for I stood some five minutes in the sitting-room, to which, of course, I had retreated, listening. My knees shook a little, and I was exceedingly thirsty ; but otherwise I had no novel sensation of any kind. I washed and put away the liqueur

glass first, and her cup and tins: then dealt with my manuscript. The woman, you see, had made it impossible for me to publish, and equally impossible for me to withdraw my memoirs. In her judgment the papers did not do me, as a writer, justice, and I trusted her judgment. I am humble. I am always ready to learn a lesson, and always pay my debts to my teachers. It was clear then to me that the *Reflections* must not see light. Yet to withdraw them was to confess to a failure—a failure of my wit, my tact, my taste. That, of course, could not be. My reputation required a middle course. So I burned the manuscript without regret in the woman's fire, and left—effectively, I think—the corner of the title-sheet unburned. I foresaw the sensation, and its value to me, when those burned papers should be discovered and identified. It took me perhaps twenty minutes to complete the task: there remained but one further precaution. I sought and found the woman's silk bag. The latch-key (you were right, Koko) was tied to a blue ribbon and sewn to the lining. I cut it, and, going into her bedroom, laid the key and her powder-case and a handkerchief in the half-open drawer of her toilet-table. It, I felt, would be a characteristic touch as well as an explanation of the situation I proposed to invent. How often have I known her arrive without a part of her gear.

"Returning, I looked round. I looked carefully, but I found no signs of my presence. It

was nearly three. Time to go. I took then the handbag, wrenched off the silken chain, and, carrying it out to the roof garden, made my final arrangements. The torn chain I hooked against the awkward step of the ladder, the step on the turn. The rifled bag itself I threw down to the woman, a dark bulk amid the litter. I had an impulse to go down and look at her; but this I resisted. It would, I knew, have disquieted me to see her so quiet. Now that we were quits, she and I, I had no longer any sense of grievance against her. On the contrary, I vehemently wished her alive that I might tell her the whole strange story and explain to her the reasons for my actions. Her intellect would have perfectly understood me. I was thinking about her, her good qualities, the curious combination in her of aristocratic head with bourgeois heart, as I closed but did not fasten the window from the inside, descended in the lift, and let myself out of the house. I walked home in the brightening darkness, still thinking of her. I was still thinking of her when I encountered my daughter in the morning. I am thinking of her now. It is very strange that I am not able to stop thinking of her."

Marmion Poole laid down his papers.

"Well?" said he eagerly, and looked from one to another.

Old Sir John Whittington stood like an image of antique justice. The moonlight turned him to marble. His shadow fell upon Savory's

face, so that the manager wore, for a moment, a black mask. Saumarez, frowning, was watching Marmion. Philibert Foulger had his mouth wide open, like a little boy listening to a ghost story. None spoke ; but Koko in his chair was shuddering like a beaten dog.

" Well ? " Marmion was shriller. " Does it get you at all ? Tell me. You can be quite frank with me."

Philibert spoke first, in the voice of a night-nervous child.

" He's mad. That's it. People don't—*Hedda Gabler*—what ? But one couldn't use it." He began to giggle.

" Be quiet ! " said Sir John Whittington sternly. And then, " Tell me, Marmion—— "

But he got no further, for Koko Fry broke in ; and his face, as he lifted it, was the face of a man who had not slept for a week.

" I don't know what to do," said Koko. " It's not a fair burden. It's too much for me. I don't know what to do. . . . Gilda—— " He shuddered again.

" Oh, my dear "—Marmion Poole rose : he had the air of one gratified and touched—" oh, my dear boy, has it moved you so ? I had no idea that it would move you so."

He looked from one to another, smiling.

Koko rose from his chair on a half-scream.

" Don't come near me ! Do you want me to do the same work ? " He struck out convulsively against the approaching figure. " Horrie and Gilda—Gilda and Horrie ! I

don't know what to do! I don't know what to do!"

He was on the edge of a breakdown; but Marmion had the air, as he watched, still smiling, of understanding him. Both men were so absorbed in themselves that Savory's voice, when he broke in, came with the dazing shock of an explosion; yet he spoke quietly.

"It's a matter for the police. You'd better come with me, Mr. Poole."

"Oh, my dear fellow, why?" said Marmion. "Because you rifle my desk for a story and I amiably provide it instead of giving you in charge. You can't hang me for pitching a tale."

"Don't worry," said Savory. "Horrie was a woman, but she was a prince to me. I guessed from the start you were behind it," said Savory, "and now I'm sure, and you're for it."

"You've no proof," said Marmion. "What are these papers from which I read? My broodings over the death of my best friend! No proof. Good publicity, as Mr. Fry will tell you, but no proof."

Savory smiled in his turn.

"Will you tell me," said he, "how you knew of the existence of Sir John Whittington's manuscript—the new novel which came to the office ten minutes after Miss Pedler had left it, and which was placed by me upon her reading-table that night? I removed it next morning, when the death"—his voice deepened—"when her murdered body had been discovered. It

was sent on to the printer's automatically. Now, you asked for it last week. Do you remember, Koko? He asked for it last week. 'That *Turn Again Whittington* in the check-board cover,' was your phrase. How did you know it had a check-board cover, Mr. Poole? Because you saw it that night when you burnt your own manuscripts."

"It's an excellent invention," said Marmion uneasily. "But it remains a good joke."

"You asked before witnesses," said Savory, "I have my witnesses as to when it came and when it left; and I have my witnesses as to what you said."

But little Koko Fry's high voice interrupted them. The scene, with its undercurrent of personal anxiety, had been altogether too much for little Koko Fry.

"The perfect murder!" he crowed, in the grip of mirthless laughter. "The perfect murder! You should have had it vetted, Poole! Horrie should have vetted it for you. That was your mistake. You didn't consult Horrie."

Hysteria had him in its grip. He turned, to collapse crowing and sobbing across the low parapet.

Marmion sat down beside him. His tired face wore an expression of solicitude; his voice, when he spoke, held regret.

"You're right," said he. "There *was* an imperfection. The word 'ridiculous' disturbed you just now. It disturbs me still. I should not," said Marmion, "have let her be ridiculous.

She should have gone to her death—easily," said Marmion, passionately. "She should have gone —thus——" said Marmion Poole.

And, springing lightly to his feet, he leapt easily, gracefully, over the low parapet, and out into space—out and down.

CHAPTER TWENTY — APOTHEOSIS

Come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed!

MACBETH.

GILDA BEDENHAM stood at the end of the panelled reception-room belonging to the Pedlar's Pack. A stepladder stood beside her; a picture in a heavy gilt frame leaned against her side. She stood a moment enjoying the Sunday silence, and thinking that there is nothing in the world so peaceful as a house of business out of business hours. But for her, she was ruefully aware, there were far fewer un-business hours than for her premises. Even her pleasures must be enjoyed briskly. And so she called sharply—for she was occupied upon a pleasure—

"Koko, do come and help!"

K. K. Fry came in. He was, by a year of age and some ages of anxiety, a solider and more serious, as well as a much more prosperous Koko Fry, a Koko awakened from nightmare, but still with the shadows of the ugly dream under his eyes; and it would be long before he forgot the ugly exertions that had followed upon the awakening. If Gilda had escaped the full horror of the nightmare, it was Koko's doing. It was Koko, who on that June night of her father's death, had held the fort for Gilda. He

had argued, implored, pleaded, raved, by every god of the witnesses' idolatry, "Let it be temporary insanity!" The paper still held in Marmion's crushed hand was—let them see for themselves—covered with no legible damnation, only with the scrawls and pencillings of irresponsibility. Let it be grief which had killed Marmion—let it be the prolonged grief over the death of a friend! Let this death be the result of long brooding on the example of innocent, clumsy Horrie! Between the action of insanity and sheer accident, what difference can there be? All had seen Marmion rock in his seat: a dizziness, a tilt, an accidental fall? Who would ask questions when none knew that there were questions to be asked? Let it be an unbalancing, physical and mental. Why not? Who could be harmed? Let them forget the ravings they had heard! Grief, brooding, temporary madness—"Great wits are oft to madness near allied," and Marmion Poole had had great wits—were cause enough for that wild confession.

He pleaded his wife: and revealed, in order to plead, the tie between the young sane woman and the overwrought ageing man. Had she not had enough to bear, his Gilda? Finally he pleaded Horrie and the Pack. What would Horrie have said, done, suffered, if she could have foreseen the end? And, on the word Horrie, won them. Poor Horrie! What could old friends do but stick by Horrie?

And so Marmion Poole was once more in

debt to Horrie Pedler, though his magnificent notices upon his decease had another view of the matter. Of these, the dignified account by the *Drum* may be taken as the best example :

" Fatal Roof-Garden Accident—Mr. Marmion Poole Dead—Former Tragedy Echoed.

" We regret to announce the death, in tragic circumstances, of Mr. Marmion Poole, the poet and dramatist. Last night, while entertaining a party of friends on the roof garden of 49 Vandeleur Street, Mr. Poole, who had been giving a reading of a new work and appeared to be in a nervous condition, slipped without warning from the parapet where he had been sitting and fell a distance of forty feet to the ground, receiving injuries which proved fatal. He died, without regaining consciousness, before medical assistance could be obtained.

" It will be remembered that Miss Horatia Pedler, founder of the Pedlar's Pack, met her death on the same spot and in the same manner some weeks ago. Miss Pedler and Mr. Poole had been associated for many years, and it was known among his friends that Mr. Poole felt her loss keenly. The obituary notice will be found on page 11."

Thus delicately did the *Drum* hint that, while it must for form's sake describe the occurrence as an accident, the discriminating reader might substitute another word and not be altogether wrong. If the paragraphs describing the actual death were bare—and they were bare : K. K. Fry and the other witnesses saw to that—on

page 11 the *Drum* let itself go. Mr. Marmion Poole, in the *Drum's* resounding opinion, was the greatest writer of light comedies since Sheridan, the greatest novelist in verse since Byron, the most picturesque literary figure since Shelley. It gave a catalogue of his works, and quoted the prices recently given for his first editions at Sotheby's ; while the tributes of his distinguished friends stretched over two columns, and even then had been ruthlessly pruned. Sir John Whittington wrote :

" I find myself quite unable to give, as you request, a survey of the influence and work of Marmion Poole. The tragic circumstances of his death, and the sense of great personal loss which all his friends must feel, preclude the dispassionate consideration of his writing which such a request implies. We are as yet too close to Poole, too near in time to judge him, though he wrote for his own generation and was its chosen prophet. It is impossible, for example, to assess the place in literature of such a masterpiece as *The Devil's Buttonhole*, where Poole, offering characteristic hospitality to a fallen angel, shows us the world and its ways through the Enemy's eyes. We may, however, be very sure that posterity will continue, as did his own generation, to discover Marmion Poole, and that his Devil will—

" be some time honoured for his burning throne."

Miss Eliza Point wrote :

" So Marmion Poole vanishes from our sky.

He was a comet, a fleeing, luminous thing that came, amazed us, and vanished again into the wide spaces. Comets from all time have been known as portents; brandies are dated by them, and the fall of kingdoms. No mere suns they: not theirs to breed maggots in a dead dog, not theirs to dwindle into our ken and fade out of it. Blazing they enter, and so depart.

"Thus it has been with Poole. Speaking of him, I think we may fitly echo Tacitus's eulogy of Agricola:

"*'Quamquam medio in spatio integræ ætatis ereptus, quantam ad gloriam, longissimum ævum peregit'* ('Though reft from us in the very prime of life, yet if glory, not years, be our measure, he was old')."

Gilda shared Eliza Point's view; and it was with the idea of impressing that view on the generations to come that she had called to her Koko for help.

"Darling," said she as he came in, "I can't stand a height. I'll hold the steps for you. Will you do this for me?"

"What's up?" quoth Koko, beaming up at her.

"I want a strong man," said tall Gilda; and Koko began, with great gravity, to roll up his sleeves and thrust out his chin.

She laughed.

"No, don't be stupid," said Gilda. "It's only that I had an idea. D'you know that it's a year to-day that poor Horrie——"

Koko abandoned his attitude. His face

assumed the wary look that it had so often worn in the past months.

"What about Horrie?" said Koko, gently.

"Well," returned Gilda, and her face had grown serious too, "I've been thinking about her all day; and I'd like to do something for Horrie. And I was sitting upstairs, looking round the room, and suddenly I knew what it was she'd like. This." And she tilted forward the heavy frame. The face of Marmion Poole, young, triumphant, laughing Marmion Poole, looked up at them.

Koko drew a quick breath.

"What do you want to do with it?" said he, foreknowing.

"Take down the woman in green," said Gilda eagerly. "She's nothing to do with the Pack. He ought to hang here, opposite Horrie. After all, they made the Pack."

"Horrie made the Pack," said Koko sharply.

"Oh, Koko," cried Gilda, "you know she always said if it hadn't been for him—— And they were such friends. She'd love it; and he'd love it. Oh, don't argue! Hang it for me, Koko, there's a dear!"

He stood a moment looking from his wife's happy face to the portrait; and then, turning, stared at Horrie Pedler herself, who, rendered in John Vetch's early manner, hung over the fireplace at the other end of the long room. But only Gilda's countenance gave him any instruction, and she knew quite well what ought to be done.

" I suppose it's the best end-up," said Koko inscrutably, and, climbing, lifted down the green lady. She dropped with a clatter, because Gilda did not do her part ; and, stooping once more, he took from his wife's hands the portrait of Marmion Poole and hung it on the vacated nail.

" Straight ? " he inquired.

" A little crooked still. Not quite enough to the right," returned his wife.

" That was what was the matter with him," muttered Koko, adjusting.

She caught the tone but not the words, and flushed.

" You're always down on him," cried Gilda.

" I never said," rejoined Koko, " that he wasn't unique——"

" Anyway, Horrie thought the world of him," began Gilda.

" You're right," said he. " He was Horrie's business, and that's all there is to it." And, descending precariously, for his wife had deserted the steps to consider the improvement from the doorway, he joined her and slipped an arm through hers.

" Don't they look jolly, looking at each other ? " said Gilda.

" Well, as long as you like it," said Koko, and suddenly stooped and kissed her.

She kissed him again, affectionately, but her mind was still upon the portraits.

" As long as *they* like it, you should say," said Gilda. " Look—Horrie does. I swear she does. Look, Koko ! "

The evening sun shot a broad beam upon the portrait of Horrie Pedler. She was majestic in her best gown, and wore about her comfortable shoulders the insignia of an honorary Doctor of Literature. But it seemed to him for an instant that, as so often in her lifetime, her incorrigible left eye quivered. Yet her eyes were not on him.

He glanced sharply across the room. But the portrait of Marmion Poole hung in shadow.

THE END

THE GOLDEN POUND

Stories by A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

AUTHOR OF IF WINTER COMES, ETC.

A. S. M. Hutchinson writes very few short stories, and this is but his second collection. Of his first *The Times Literary Supplement* was constrained to write: "The secret of Mr. Hutchinson's wizardry is his simplicity; he speaks to the common heart of all of us with words which that part of us understands"; and that same wizardry is here in "The Golden Pound" in all its compelling phases. As whimsical humour of "A.S.M.'s" own peculiar sort, the story entitled "The Girl with the Grave Nose" is sheerest delight, and there are several others in precisely the same vein. "What Shakespeare Knew" is, on the other hand, a theory of Shakespeare's genius which, though presented in story form, may well enough leave many readers, and them by no means the least thoughtful, with the serious reflection: "'Pon my soul, I believe there is something in it!" And the volume concludes with an allegory, "Set in Dominion," which probably no one but A. S. M. Hutchinson could have written, and which might well have been issued in separate form, so that the lesson it reads and the hope it gives could be preserved as stimulus and inspiration when life seems out of joint and how to mend it hard indeed.

THE ENGLISH PARAGON

By MARJORIE BOWEN

AUTHOR OF DICKON, ETC.

Marjorie Bowen's new historical novel deals with the Spanish campaign, the revolt in Aquitaine, and the last events in which Edward Plantagenet Prince of Wales took an active part—during the years 1366–1371. Not till some hundred years after his death was he named the Black Prince. The events are dealt with from the viewpoint of Pope Urban V, Charles V of Valois, Charles of Navarre, Edward III, Queen Philippa, Bertrand du Guesclin, Pedro the Cruel and Edward of Wales himself. Separate episodes are given to each character associated with some phase in the life of a common person —a vine-dresser, a Paris clerk, a baker, a monk, two London boys, an Englishman-at-arms and a French town councillor, while through the whole narrative runs the impassive figure of an Oriental doctor and philosopher who combines the episodes.

THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED

By LEONARD MERRICK

AUTHOR OF CONRAD IN QUEST OF HIS YOUTH, ETC.

Under perhaps the most charming of all his titles—"The Little Dog Laughed"—Mr. Leonard Merrick gives us at length a further volume of his inimitable stories. Here again is that charm of style and brilliance of execution with which every reader of "While Paris Laughed" or "A Chair on the Boulevard" is so familiar. The titles of the stories making up this volume are as follows: "The Elevation of Lulu," "Five Bells," "Little Birdie—A Christmas Idyll," "The Shoelace," "Mate," "The Vengeance of Monsieur Dutripon," "The Dovecote," "Poor Dear George," "The Crime of Olga Jibinski," "I Recall a Seat," "The Surgeon was Right," "A Cure for Dyspepsia," "The Departure of Papa," "The Epic of the Heavenly Cook."

BLUE FLAMES

By RICHMAL CROMPTON

AUTHOR OF THE WILDINGS, ETC.

All admirers of Richmal Crompton will welcome this novel, the most recent and most typical example of her skilful craft. It exhibits to the full those characteristics which have won her well-known popularity—dealing, as it does, in observant detail with the different members of a large and widely varying family, who are drawn with masterly touch. The title is derived from the blue flames in a log fire—which, to the hero of the story, signify his boyish dreams and vague ambitions. These visions are never quite realised—whose are ?—but their charm and fascination linger with him right through life, to compensate him for the actualities of his self-sacrificing career. Readers will follow with keen interest and enjoyment the fortunes of the numerous *dramatis personæ* presented to them in "Blue Flames."

THE KNIFE BEHIND THE CURTAIN

STORIES OF THE SECRET SERVICE

By VALENTINE WILLIAMS

AUTHOR OF THE CROUCHING BEAST, ETC.

The creator of "Clubfoot" has a fine flair for the mystery and crime story, as all who read his magnificent detective novel, "The Eye in Attendance," know so well. Into this volume he has collected a baker's dozen of short stories, all dealing with mystery and crime in their various manifestations. These stories make a splendid and most exciting volume.

PRINTER'S DEVIL

By CLEMENCE DANE & HELEN SIMPSON

AUTHORS OF ENTER SIR JOHN

The entry of these two brilliant collaborators into the field of detective fiction with "Enter Sir John" was quite one of the outstanding literary events of the past year. The same qualities of brilliance and wit that characterise "Enter Sir John" characterise the mystery of the murder of a publisher, which is the central fact of "Printer's Devil," the new novel which Miss Clemence Dane and Miss Helen Simpson have written. Fond, foolish, Horrie Pedler—rejoicing in the success of her unique publishing business, "The Pedlar's Pack" and the return to England of her star author, Marmion Poole, debonair, devil-may-care, as ever; and happy in the devotion of her many friends—was found dead at the foot of the little twisted staircase that led to her flat high above the roofs of the City. Many mourned her; the newspapers published laudatory obituary notices; but, at the Coroner's inquest, a faint, sinister note was heard, particularly with regard to the disappearance of a certain MS. Rumour had it that the MS. contained many people's secrets, and Horrie alone, besides its author, had read it! So cleverly have the authors mixed comedy and tragedy that the ridiculous, charming little love affair of the Highbrow Gilda and the little Cockney publicity agent, Koko Fry, is inseparable from the tragedy of Horrie's death, and right to the last page readers will be quite undecided as to whether they have enjoyed a first-class comedy or a breath-taking thriller, for both are to be found in this story.

THE LAST HERO

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

Hodder and Stoughton present Leslie Charteris for the first time in their lists. His work is in fact most uncommon and most uncommonly good. There is even something very intriguing in this little paragraph which he has kindly written for us to introduce his new novel, "The Last Hero." "There are gathered here," said Simon Templar, known to many as the Saint, "three somewhat shop-soiled musketeers—and a blessed angel. Barring the blessed angel, we've broken half the Commandments and most of the private laws of several countries. Fighting is our job. Battle and sudden death. In fact, we must be the last three men in the wide world who ought to be interfering with the makings of a perfectly good war. But there aren't many like us. Will you think me quite mad if I put it to you that three shabby hell-bursting outlaws might, by the grace of God . . .?"

FAIR STOOD THE WIND

By C. LENANTON

AUTHOR OF MISS BARRETT'S ELOPEMENT, ETC.

Mrs. Lenanton's most popular modern novel so far was called, you will remember, "The Holiday." "Fair Stood the Wind" is the story of another holiday. Mrs. Oliphant's party, which sets out to motor through France and Italy, includes a young married couple, a naval officer on leave, an architect, a spoilt beauty, two attractive débutantes, three undergraduates and a pre-war girl. The scene passes from the bleak quay-side at Southampton to Northern France, to high noon by the Swiss Lakes. We follow the party over the most shrouded Alps into the sun-drenched plains of Lombardy, up to a summer resort in the Tyrol, and down to the French Riviera in September. Much may happen to twelve people when they set out to travel together for five weeks, and Mrs. Oliphant's oddly assorted party experience many surprises, many delights, some bad quarters of an hour and some unexpected *contretemps*. The scene changes rapidly and the travellers come together in different surroundings nearly every night, but there is time for friendships—and the reverse —to be made, and when the party splits up to return home to England, at least two of the cars toiling north towards the French coast vanish—haloed by the golden dust of romance.

EARTH-BATTLE

By DOROTHY COTTRELL

AUTHOR OF THE SINGING GOLD

Country Life heralded Dorothy Cottrell's first novel "The Singing Gold" as "*a first novel of a very great novelist.*" And here is Dorothy Cottrell's second Queensland novel—"Earth-Battle." Thirty years spent in cultivating a vast tract of land in Queensland—stocking it, conquering a seven years' drought, and being conquered by fire. "Old H.B.," a colossus of sheep-farming, gathers his harvest of ashes when the man he has committed, unjustly, to thirty years penal servitude lives through those years to fire his land. But through those thirty years flowers, trees, birds, beasts, weather, men and women come and go vividly. There is a vastness about the land and the life which carry one along into another world; and the author's memory is stocked with incidents—lovely things, some of them, terrible sometimes, but always interesting.

THE PEEPING TOWER

By J. E. BUCKROSE

AUTHOR OF PAYMENT IN KIND, ETC.

Another of Mrs. Buckrose's sympathetic and human stories. Bereft of a devoted husband, Mrs. Queedy, at the age of sixty, suddenly discovered the meaning of loneliness; and an incautious word, overheard, revealed to her of how little account she was to anyone. Under the smart of this discovery the ugly house with the tower became her refuge from her friends, but she reckoned without the strange, instinctive hostility of the natives of the little village to "foreigners" and the legends of the countryside, which remained as real to them as they had been to their forefathers. Mrs. Queedy found happiness in the locked room in the tower and an escape from the loneliness that haunted her days. But the village watched with suspicion, which gradually developed into a dull hatred and fear. Only sturdy little Gladys with the active pink-clad legs stood her friend, and even she sometimes thought of the witch who haunted the pond! Theft, attempted murder, and suicide. What was the connection between them and the placid well-meaning lady of the Tower House.

SPIDERWEB

By ALICE CAMPBELL

AUTHOR OF JUGGERNAUT, ETC.

Alice Campbell made the hit of the season with her first crime story, "Juggernaut." There is the same thrill and even more suspense in her new novel, "Spiderweb." Pretty Catherine West was the unwary fly that walked into the spiderweb in her cousin's lovely flat in Paris. The threads of the web were as intangible as gossamer, but slowly and surely they tightened round her until every day was a day of fear and uncertainty. Luckily, the unapproachable young Englishman she had met in the train proved less unapproachable on further acquaintance, and, although unconvinced and inclined to laugh away her fears, he was alert and ready when the time for action arrived. Poor, frail, rich Madame Bender, with her griefs and fears, was an easy prey for the woman she thought to be her best friend, and even Catherine, with her youthful courage and pitying love, was almost deceived and baffled. Fate, however, intervened. Many things were revealed and Catherine saved from death, all through a woman's love of trying on a new hat.

THE THIRTY THIEVES

By B. DYKE ACLAND

AUTHOR OF FILIBUSTER

Colonel Acland's first and most rollicking yarn, "Filibuster," was one of the discoveries of 1929, and here is his second novel. The title—"The Thirty Thieves"—sounds both intriguing and lively, and the story certainly lives up to the title. Underlying the humorous account of intrigues and the vivid delineation of character is a satire on the political methods of the post-war period. The demagogue, the dictator, the extremist, all appear on the stage, and are silhouetted against a background of almost mediæval simplicity—a country in which the peasant and the burgher contend in age-long strife. The book is amusing and free from bitterness, and is flooded with colour, as was "Filibuster."

ON HELLE'S WAVE

By HUGH IMBER

AUTHOR OF THE SPINE

We heralded Mr. Hugh Imber's first novel "The Spine" as a discovery, and were delighted to find that the public shared our view, for this novel was not only highly praised by all the critics, but found great favour with the reading public, and rapidly entered its second edition. It will be no secret to anybody who read "The Spine" that the author has a very special acquantiance with the Near East, and we are therefore most glad to announce that his new novel is set in the same part of the world, in the little Turkish town of Chanak, which eight years ago became all too famous. In September, 1922, the people of Great Britain found to their alarm that they were standing on the verge of war with Turkey. The current of events at Constantinople and Chanak, and the negotiations by which hostilities were averted, are matters of history, and it is into this framework that Mr. Imber has fitted his story. Frank Rawson, freshly arrived from Egypt, finds awaiting him the problem of the singular disappearance of a British officer, followed almost immediately by a murder committed with extraordinary audacity and little apparent motive. His investigations bring him into contact with the young wife of the missing man, and after a time he realises that he has fallen in love with her, and that a successful conclusion to his enquiries must mean the frustration of what he most desires. His efforts, however, are unavailing until at length there comes from the Turkish side information which provides the key to the whole riddle. Even at the last moment a daring and unexpected move on the part of his adversary almost ruins his plans, but a hasty pursuit into the mountains of Asia Minor ends in the triumph of justice.

A POOR MAN CAME IN SIGHT

By E. GODFRAY SELLICK

The remarkably unusual title is here balanced by the remarkably unusual contents. In period, plot, personalities, in picturesque and vivid reconstruction of the fourteenth century, this novel stands unique. The profound undercurrent of spirituality, the passionate depths of human feeling, cannot fail to stir the most blasé reader. The story of Richard Josling, rich merchant, of Lyme Regis, in Dorset, and of his wanton wife, Isabel; how he slew her lover, and must do penance; how he, she, and their sick child made the Canterbury Pilgrimage in bitter poverty and hardship, Richard being now a ruined man; how he returned to Lyme, bereft of son, wife, wealth, and of old unavailing beliefs, yet possessed of God Himself, an exceeding great reward;—all this is told, not only with absorbing detail, but with great nobility of thought. This is a book of outstanding quality in all respects—a romance which rings true throughout. Villainy is shown riding triumphant, and virtue suffering wrong: yet the Poor Man comes in sight a victor at the end.

THE SPLENDOUR OF GOD

By HONORÉ WILLSIE MORROW

AUTHOR OF STILL JIM, ETC.

In 1813 a young, impetuous crusader from New England and a delicate girl of great beauty landed at Rangoon. Adoniram and Ann Judson, the first Baptist missionaries, had come to Burma. Burma—the land of darkness—where "foreign devils" with Western ideas and their absurd story of Jesus Christ were promised persecution torture, and death. This biographical novel is the magnificent story of Adoniram Judson, a great missionary and a born leader of men, a brilliant scholar; the story of twenty dramatic, thrilling years filled with colour and action and romance. The real crisis in his life comes after Ann's death, when he is plunged into such depths of despair that his spirit is almost overpowered by the insidious mysticism of the East, and Adoniram Judson, the crusading missionary of Christ, hovers month after month on the edge of a fanatic asceticism almost Buddhistic. When he finally emerges, it is with a new strength. Friendship with the charming Sarah Boardman develops into love; eight years after Ann's death they are married, and the story ends with their return to Rangoon and the establishment of the Church which endures to this day. This is the vivid story of a great crusade such as takes and moves the hearts of men and women in all ages.

THE VANTINE DIAMONDS

By SEAMARK

AUTHOR OF THE WEB OF DESTINY, ETC

This new story bears the Seamark hall-mark of the perfectly satisfying thriller. Sir Elroyd Horle, a gentleman of wealth and high repute, secretly organises, through the sly and crafty Manello, big jewel robberies. His latest haul is the Vantine Diamonds. Chris Cartery is engaged by Mr. Vantine to hound down the thief and recover the diamonds, but the police, who believe him to be an impostor, make his task harder by trying to frustrate his plans at every turn. There follow many exciting and daring escapades when only Cartery's great strength saves him from death at the hands of Manello's gang, and only his quick and cunning brain finally brings the diamonds into his possession in a very unusual manner. Seamark is again to the fore with this absorbing tale of adventure, love, and crime in and around London.

THE HONOURABLE PURSUIT

By PATRICK WYNNTON

AUTHOR OF THE LOST MARK, ETC.

Wynnton for Adventure! After much adventuring, Sir Hugo Mason had found his "life's work" in Sainte Marie Curvette—that strange little town where a crook of a finger meant "I desire to deal in contraband," or, the tinkle of a bicycle bell—"Beware! The Officers of Customs and Revenue approach!" The smuggling of alcohol to the old rascal Fournier had proved, in the eyes of Hugo and his gang, a remunerative and "honourable" pursuit. But disaster overtook the gang when, in the streets of Sainte Marie Curvette, the eyes of Hugo and the woman police spy Theresa met. Flight, aided by Theresa, before the Revenue Officers, to the smugglers' island lair, was followed by shipwreck near the Forest of Challon. Accident rendering Hugo helpless, the evil La Guepe attempts to force the gang to traffic in dope. Refusing this dishonourable pursuit, Hugo flees into the forest where he is tended by Theresa. But the trap is closing and, to save Hugo, Theresa barters her own freedom, as a betrayer of the State, for that of the gang. How she escapes the dreadful penalty and finds fulfilment of her love constitutes a delightful conclusion to a story palpitating with thrills.

The Times Book Club,